The Pre-Christian Religions of the North

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS OF THE NORTH

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VOLUME I

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North

Research and Reception, Volume 1: From the Middle Ages to *c.* 1830

Edited by

Margaret Clunies Ross

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations for Volume I

DOE	Angus Cameron et al., eds. 2007–. *Dictionary of Old English: A to G Online* and *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project. http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca
Edda 1787–1828	Guðmundur Magnæus, Jón Johnsonius, Jón Ólafsson, Finnur Magnússon and Gunnar Pálsson, eds. 1787–1828. *Edda Sæmundar hinns fróda. Edda rhythmica seu antiqvior, vulgo Sæmundina dicta. Ex codice Bibliothecæ Regiæ Hafniensis pergameno, necnon diversis Legati Arnæ-Magnæani et aliorum membraneis chartaceisqve melioris notæ manuscriptis. Cum interpretatione Latina, lectionibus variis, notis, glossario vocum et indice rerum*. 3 vols. Copenhagen: Sumtibus Legati Magnæani et Gyldendalii. [cited as *Edda* 1787–1828, vol. no. (Roman): page nos]
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag. [ongoing series of standard editions of Icelandic sagas and other texts; cited as *ÍF* vol. no. (Roman): page number; *ÍF* xxxiv: 432, etc.]
ÍF i (pts 1 and 2)	*Íslendingabók*; *Landnámabók*. Ed. Jakob Benediktsson. 1968.
ÍF ii	*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. Ed. Sigurður Nordal. 1933.
ÍF iii	*Borgfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. 1938.
ÍF iv	*Eyrbyggja saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson. 1935.
ÍF v	*Laxdæla saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. 1934.
ÍF vi	*Vestfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. 1943.
ÍF vii	*Grettis saga Ásmundarson*. Ed. Guðni Jónsson. 1936.
ÍF viii	*Vatnsdæla saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. 1939.
ÍF ix	*Eyfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson. 1956.
ÍF x	*Ljósvetninga saga*. Ed. Björn Sigfússon. 1940.
ÍF xi	*Austfirðinga sögur*. Ed. Jón Jóhannesson. 1950.

ÍF XII	*Brennu-Njáls saga*. Ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson. 1954.
ÍF XIII	*Harðar saga*. Ed. Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. 1991.
ÍF XIV	*Kjalnesinga saga*. Ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson. 1959.
ÍF XV–XVI	*Biskupa sögur I–II.* Ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote. 2003.
ÍF. XVII	*Biskupa sögur III*. Ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. 1998.
ÍF XXIII–XXIV	*Morkinskinna I–II.* Ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson. 2011.
ÍF XXVI–XXVIII	*Heimskringla.* Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 1941–51.
ÍF XXIX	*Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna. Nóregs konunga tal*. Ed. Bjarni Einarsson. 1984.
ÍF XXXIV	*Orkneyinga saga*. Ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson. 1965.
ÍF XXXV	*Danakonunga sögur*. Ed. Bjarni Guðnason. 1982.
ÍF Edd.	*Eddukvæði I–II*. Íslenzk fornrit. Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014).
NK	Neckel, Gustav, and Hans Kuhn, eds. 1983. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, I: *Text*. 5th edn. Heidelberg: Winter. [cited by page number, e.g. *NK* 156]
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edn online <www.oed.com.eproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au>.
Saxo 2015	Friis-Jensen, Karsten, ed. 2015. *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*. Trans. Peter Fisher. 2 vols. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
SkP	Clunies Ross, Margaret, Kari Ellen Gade, Guðrún Nordal, Edith Marold, Diana Whaley and Tarrin Wills, eds. 2007–. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. 9 vols. Turnhout: Brepols. [cited by poem/poet siglum and by volume no. (Roman), or by vol., part and page number]
SkP I	Whaley, Diana, ed. 2012. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, I: *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. 2 pts. Turnhout: Brepols.
SkP II	Gade, Kari Ellen, ed. 2009. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, II: *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c. 1036 to c. 1300*. 2 pts. Turnhout: Brepols.

SkP III	Gade, Kari Ellen, and Edith Marold, eds. 2017. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, III: *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*. 2 pts. Turnhout: Brepols.
SkP V	Wills, Tarrin, et al., eds. Forthcoming. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, V: *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*. Turnhout: Brepols.
SkP VII	Clunies Ross, Margaret, ed. 2007. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages.* Vol. VII. *Poetry on Christian Subjects*. 2 pts. Turnhout: Brepols.
SkP VIII	Clunies Ross, Margaret, ed. 2017. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, VIII: *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*. 2 pts. Turnhout: Brepols.
SnE 1998	Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998. *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
SnE 2005	Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd edn. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research.
SnE 2007	Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2007. *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Háttatal*. 2nd edn. University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

Introduction to Volume 1

Margaret Clunies Ross

Pre-Christian Religions of the North: A Joint Project

The present volume and a second, yet to be published, that will bring the history of the reception of early Scandinavian religion and myth up to the present time, are part of a larger project aimed at revaluing what we know of the pre-Christian religions of the North, that is, the various religions known to have been practised in Scandinavia and adjacent regions in the time before the indigenous peoples of these regions adopted Christianity. Other volumes to appear in the *Pre-Christian Religions of the North* series, all published by Brepols, will include four volumes, subtitled *Histories and Structures*, in which the received understanding of pre-Christian Scandinavian myth and religion will be examined and revised *ab initio*, and two volumes subtitled *Sources*, one reviewing key textual, the other, key archaeological sources.

The project as a whole was the brainchild of Professor Jónas Kristjánsson, Director of the Árni Magnússon Institute at the University of Iceland from 1972 to 1994, who died in 2014 before the project was very far advanced. Its direction was entrusted to Bergur Þorgeirsson, Director of the Snorrastofa research

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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centre at Reykholt, Iceland, who has worked with a small local committee to guide the work of the editors of each of the three strands of the project.

Research and Reception: The Approach

The subtitle of the two volumes for which I am responsible as editor is *Research and Reception*. The aim of the project is to document how pre-Christian religions and mythology of the North were understood and 'received', in the sense of the German term *Rezeption*, from the beginning of their recorded history, that is, not only assimilated but made new by those who came to understand them in terms made possible by their own historical and cultural environments. Reception theory appeared as a distinct branch of literary theory in the 1970s, particularly with the work of Hans Robert Jauss (1982 [1977]) and Wolfgang Iser (1978 [1976]). While their writings were primarily directed to the reception of works of literature, other disciplines, such as mythology, were also treated within the same theoretical framework (e.g. Blumenberg 1985 [1979]). Reception theory has also been applied to audience responses to popular media in communication and media disciplines.

Fundamental to reception studies is the assumption that the individual reader (or intelligent human more generally) understands a work of art or cultural artefact like a myth or set of beliefs against the background of an existing horizon of expectations consisting of the individual's or group's current knowledge and presuppositions. These affect how the individual 'receives' a cultural artefact and usually conditions his or her response to it. In turn, the combined responses of many individuals at a particular point in time to an artwork or a set of concepts associated with a particular topic, like Norse mythology, may bring about a change in the meanings a whole society, or a subset of a society, assigns to such a work or set of ideas. This happened, for example, during the early nineteenth century in Europe, especially in the German- and English-speaking worlds, when *Norse* mythology was widely appropriated by poets, philosophers, historians and artists as a lost original *German* or *Germanic* mythology.

Reception theory further argues that a work of art or cultural artefact is present to those who receive it only in the various forms of its reception and that no versions of that reception are privileged over others as more original or more final. If we apply this perspective to the pre-Christian religions of the North, we can better understand the sequence of interpretations that Old Norse religion and myth have undergone from the Middle Ages to the present time in the context of changing views of pagan religions on the part of Western cultures and changing views of the meanings to be attributed to myths.

It is clear that the application of reception theory to any topic requires an awareness of the ideological background to its reception in a historical perspective. This can be applied on the level of individual responses to an artwork or concept, or at the level of a wider social group's or a whole society's reception. It can focus upon the way in which writers, artists and other intellectuals understood and received a work or a concept, or on how a wider reading or receiving public interpreted it. What is of interest in this kind of study is how the interpreter's mental stance affects the object of interpretation and the reasons why he adopted that stance, as well as the nature of the object interpreted itself.

The two volumes of this study of how the pre-Christian religions and myths of Scandinavia have been received over time have been organized around a chronological sequence of chapters that plot changes in the reception of this cultural inheritance from the earliest relevant written texts until the twenty-first century. This chronological perspective will enable us to see in detail for the first time how the evidence of Nordic pre-Christian religion and myth recorded in Viking Age and medieval sources (which were themselves receptions of earlier, unattested sources) was transformed and reinterpreted by later generations. These people based themselves on their own preconceptions about religion and myth as well as on the knowledge that they were able to access, initially from mainly Icelandic sources, that gradually spread beyond Scandinavia from the sixteenth century onwards.

The reception history of the religions and myths of the North has been and continues to be very important to the cultural history of Europe and human society generally. Even though our sources, both textual and archaeological, are by no means complete and never will be, the information we have inherited from the Middle Ages and more recently acquired by archaeological excavation is substantially greater for Scandinavia than for any other pre-Christian European society. For various and quite disparate reasons, over the centuries, people of European background have found it urgently important to invoke Nordic religion and myth and sometimes to appropriate them as their own. The history of that reception is traced in the two volumes of the *Research and Reception* strand. Volume I covers the period from the earliest recorded receptions to the early nineteenth century for the most part, though some of its later chapters, for example those on art history, continue into the early twentieth century. Volume II continues from where Volume I leaves off, and deals mainly with nineteenth- and twentieth-century receptions, a period when transformations of Norse myth, in particular, proliferated in music, art, literature and a host of new media. Many of these reinterpretations had a political purpose, especially in the German-speaking lands. Another dimension to the more

recent reception has been the reinterpretation of pre-Christian Nordic religion by New Age and neopagan spiritual movements, which often have links with the political extreme right.

One of the more remarkable conclusions we are able to draw from a historical study of this subject is that certain key ideas about the pre-Christian religions of the North have persisted over many centuries, even though the reasons why people held these ideas have arisen from quite different presuppositions at different times. In the medieval period it was common for Christians to draw on the late classical explanation for the existence of pagan religions, called euhemerism. This theory held that the beings pagans erroneously considered to be gods were really humans of a former age whom later generations had believed to be divine on account of their outstanding achievements. This view appears in a number of Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon sources discussed in this volume, but it remained popular well beyond the Middle Ages, particularly in combination with the idea that situated the fraudulent poseurs who masqueraded as the Norse deities, the Æsir, as immigrants to Europe from Asia. The myth of migration from Asia, based on a false etymology of the Old Norse word for the pagan gods, *Æsir*, is still being treated as historical fact in the very popular history of Scandinavia by Paul Henri Mallet in the middle of the eighteenth century, but here it is combined with more recent theories about how cold climates influence the character of northern peoples (see Chapter 4.5 in this volume).

Another dimension to the reception history of the pre-Christian religions of the North is the changing character of the reception itself from a concern to explain the old religion and mythology in the context of Christian theories of the nature of paganism to a reception which depended on a basically aesthetic response to the question: could Norse heathendom be a fitting vehicle for the lofty concepts of an educated society more used to classical mythology in literature and art? Still another strand, mainly pursued by Icelanders until the nineteenth century, could be called preservational: it involved the desire to retain and transmit the old mythological lore and the texts in which it was encoded, though with updates, rearrangements and additions of a later date (see Chapter 3.2). This strand led ultimately to the academic study of Old Norse literature and the medieval sources on which modern textual research into the pre-Christian religions of the North is based.

Given the assumption of reception theory that no version of a work's or set of concepts' reception should be privileged over any other, with the implication that all are of equal value, there may seem to be an apparent tension between this even-handed acceptance of variety in interpretation and the premises of

research, the other part of this two-pronged analytical approach to the pre-Christian religions of the North. The term 'research' is usually understood in a scientific or academic context as the investigation of a subject whose objective is to advance knowledge by empirical inquiry and critical thinking in a process that can be objectively documented. This understanding is partly at odds with the notion of reception, but only partly, for, while reception studies may not pass judgement on the merits of one form of reception over another, they can and do reveal the bases of such receptions. Some of these can therefore be shown to be less adequate than others in terms of their ability to explain and understand the phenomena in question. For example, even in his own day many people were sceptical of the hypothesis of the Humanist scholar Olaus Rudbeck (1630–1702) that Sweden was the true Atlantis and Swedish the original language of Adam (see Chapter 3.1), although the theories he drew on to arrive at this conclusion were not uncommon in the seventeenth century.

One of the objectives of the present study is to reveal the various preconceptions and ideologies that led to different receptions of the pre-Christian religions of the North over time, and which partly stood in the way of research into this subject in the modern sense. At the same time this study also shows how knowledge of the medieval sources from which modern research could build up an overview of the pre-Christian religion and mythology of Scandinavia gradually became available, at the outset chiefly through the work of Icelandic scholars.

Returning to the question of the relationship between the processes of research and reception, they can be seen as complementary, although present in varying proportions in individual or group responses to the subject of the pre-Christian religions of the North. It would be ludicrous to suggest that modern research within the academic disciplines of literary and textual studies, the history of religions, archaeology and linguistics, has not advanced our knowledge of the pre-Christian religions of the North and their associated mythology. Yet it is now recognized, more perhaps than it was in former times, that research itself is subject to changes in cultural values and assumptions, and that research is itself a kind of reception, just as artistic creativity is.

In both volumes of this study academic research into Nordic religion and myth is subject to the same processes of analysis as are kinds of reception that are less obviously dependent on critical enquiry. While many forms of reception documented in Volume I were less dependent on research in the modern sense than on presuppositions about pagan religions and the characteristics of early human thought and expression that were common at particular periods of time, most instances of reception recorded in this volume involve some enquiry

into the subject, based on the available literature and traditions inherited from the past. Volume II traces the development of modern research into the pre-Christian religions of the North against the background of dominant theories about language, religion and myth that gained currency in the nineteenth century and continued to evolve in the twentieth. At the same time, it traces the diverse ways in which these theories affected the reception of Norse mythology and religion outside an academic context in a variety of media and by a variety of social groups. There is no end to the reception of this subject, only a series of transformations.

The Structure of Volume I

This volume is arranged in eight parts of disparate length. There are editorial Introductions to the first two parts, which aim to give some interpretative signposts to material that may be less familiar to many readers than later parts because of its early date. **Part 1**, *Looking In: The Non-Scandinavian Perspective*, assembles information about what non-Scandinavian peoples who came into contact with the North in late antiquity or the early Middle Ages thought about their neighbours' religion, based in many cases on rather slender evidence. **Part 2**, *The View from Inside: Medieval Scandinavian Reception*, however, looks at how medieval Christian Scandinavian writers, mainly Icelanders, went about transmitting and reinterpreting lore about the religion and myths of their ancestors both for their own society's consumption and for posterity. This part is divided into two sections: the first explains the chief theories used by medieval Christians to account for pagan religions and looks at how Icelandic writers applied those theories to their own religious inheritance; while the second demonstrates how the dominant vernacular textual genres of eddic and skaldic poetry, sagas (including historical works) and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson presented and used pre-Christian religious ideas and practices and information about Norse myths in their works.

In **Part 3**, *The Humanist Reception*, two chapters reveal how, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Scandinavian antiquarian scholars particularly in Sweden and Denmark began to investigate the early history and culture of their own societies, impelled by a desire to promote the national glory of their own country as well as by a growing interest in the distinctive culture of the Nordic past. Even the greatest of these scholars was dependent, however, on Icelandic interpreters of that past, for few non-Icelanders then possessed the ability to understand Old Norse-Icelandic, the language of most relevant documents. Thus Icelanders were of crucial importance in bringing knowledge

of the old religion to the rest of Scandinavia, and, to some extent, to other parts of Europe. They were also, however, involved themselves in the reception and reinterpretation of medieval sources, mostly for consumption by their fellow countrymen.

Part 4, *From Humanism to the Romantics*, documents the first period of the truly international reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North. This coincides with two major European intellectual movements: the Enlightenment and the pre-Romantic age during the second half of the eighteenth century. The chapters here analyse how Enlightenment ideals constructed particular interpretations of Nordic religions and how key ideas about the Northern origins of political concepts of liberty and love of freedom helped shape European approaches to the image of Northern antiquity. Early Norse poetry and myths became objects of intense interest to pre-Romantic writers of the second half of the eighteenth century, who saw them, together with other early European poetry, as an expression of the primitive sublime. This interest foreshadowed the more complex influence of Norse mythological poetry on the Romantic movement of the last decades of the eighteenth and the early decades of the nineteenth century. A chapter on one of the most influential works of this period on early Nordic culture, including religion, Paul Henri Mallet's *Histoire de Dannemark*, completes this section.

Part 5, *The Romantics*, comprises eight chapters, all but the last on the Romantic reception of early Scandinavian religion and myth (mostly the latter) in seven individual European language communities: the German-speaking world, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, England, Russia and Poland. These chapters demonstrate common tropes of reception (sublimity, superiority to classical forms, genetic connections between the receivers and the ancient North) as well as considerable differences between the receiving communities, both in terms of the elaboration of the response and its extent. This part concludes with a chapter on the literary and artistic reception across Europe of a key work, the Old Icelandic mythological poem *Baldrs draumar* ('Baldr's Dreams').

Part 6 turns to the reception of Norse religion and myth in drama and all forms of the visual arts from the middle of the eighteenth century until the late nineteenth and, in some cases, the early twentieth centuries. This part is also divided into two sections, the first treating the little-known history of the reception in drama up to the mid-nineteenth century. The longer time span for most chapters in this section is appropriate to the analysis of themes and debates which seem to have affected the artistic community particularly strongly, especially in Sweden and Denmark, and led to a prolongation of arguments between the champions of classical versus Nordic mythology as the most appropri-

ate subject matter for the visual arts. Here also there are national differences between artistic communities: as might be expected, Norse mythology figures strongly and early as a subject for art in Scandinavia outside Norway, but in Germany, while it took some time for artists to catch up with the Scandinavian trend, when they did so the diverse political uses of Norse mythic symbols in art and architecture cannot be paralleled elsewhere for their boldness and variety. In England, however, while Norse myths appear very early in the visual arts, they are much reduced during the nineteenth century, in parallel with the British Romantics' failure to embrace themes from Norse myth in their poetry.

Parts 7 and 8 each contain only one chapter and anticipate some of the themes taken up in Volume II. The subject of Part 7, *Enabling Philology*, is a prelude to a number of the chapters in Volume II that trace the development of fresh approaches to Norse religion and mythology based on the new disciplines of comparative linguistics and religion. It discusses new developments in the understanding of the Germanic languages and the status of Old Norse within that language family, as well as advances in the publication and availability of key Old Norse textual sources. Part 8, *The Early Grundtvig*, is the first of two chapters on a single Danish individual, N. F. S. Grundtvig, whose work embodied several of the most important approaches to Nordic religion and myth of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. While in his early work he developed a holistic though eccentric aesthetic approach to both myth and religion, in his later years he advocated Norse mythology as a common figurative language for nineteenth-century Scandinavians within a Christian spiritual framework. The later Grundtvig is the subject of the first chapter in Volume II, while the early Grundtvig, looking both back and forward, concludes Volume I.

Some Key Technical Terms

Some of the chapters in Volume I, particularly the earlier ones, refer to several terms that will be familiar to those who research or study Old Norse-Icelandic culture, but they are explained briefly here for those possibly less familiar with them.

Old Norse

In the English-language tradition of scholarship, the term 'Old Norse' refers to the language, literature and culture of the early medieval societies of Norway and the colonies established largely from Norway in the period between *c.* 750–950 AD, including the islands of Orkney, Shetland, the Hebrides, the

Faroes, Iceland and Greenland. It usually excludes contemporary Danish and Swedish culture, although such a differentiation cannot and should not be strictly observed.

Eddic or Eddaic Poetry

The term 'eddic (or 'eddaic') poetry' refers to vernacular Old Norse alliterative poetry in so-called eddic verse-forms (for a recent handbook, see Larrington et al. 2016). In Old Norse the chief eddic verse-form is called *fornyrðislag* ('old story metre'). Eddic poetry uses verse-forms similar to those of other early Germanic languages, such as Old English, Old Saxon and Old High German, in which two half-lines, each with four metrical positions, two of them being fully stressed, are linked in a long line by means of word-initial alliteration on one or two of the stressed syllables. For example (with alliterating syllables in bold):

Vara **s**andr né **s**ær né **s**valar unnir (*Vǫluspá* 3/3–4)
'There was not sand nor sea nor cold waves'

Most Old Norse eddic poetry has been recorded in medieval Icelandic manuscripts, although some runic inscriptions in eddic metres from Denmark, Sweden and Norway indicate that this kind of poetry was also known more widely within Scandinavia.

Skaldic Poetry

Skaldic poetry takes its name from the Old Norse word *skáld*, meaning 'a poet', originally a court poet composing for the kings and jarls of Norway. The earliest recorded skaldic poetry is attributed to the Norwegian skald Bragi Boddason, probably active in the second half of the ninth century, but his compositions, and those of other early skalds, were recorded in much later Norwegian and Icelandic manuscripts, principally within sagas of kings and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (see below). Skaldic poetry does not seem to have been composed in Norway after the twelfth century, but it continued to be composed by Icelanders well into the fourteenth century and sometimes later than that.

From a formal point of view, skaldic poetry differs from eddic verse in being a syllable-counting stanzaic metre, with six syllables to the line in the commonest metre, *dróttkvætt* ('poetry of the *drótt* or royal retinue'), each full stanza being formed of eight lines. Like eddic verse, skaldic poetry links pairs of lines by alliteration, but it also employs internal rhyme in stressed syllables of even

lines and a form of assonance in the stressed syllables of odd lines. In addition, skaldic diction and word order is complex. Its most obvious characteristic is the skalds' use of kennings (*kenningar*), two-element noun phrases that stand for an unnamed referent, like *angr ýs* ('the sorrow of the yew') for fire. Many kenning types involve the use of allusions to Old Norse pre-Christian myths, and may refer to the pre-Christian gods, either by name or synonymously. It is necessary for anyone hearing (and now reading) skaldic poetry to know what these mythic allusions mean. It is for this reason, it is claimed in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, that the third part of this work, *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Speech of Poetry'), was written to make the old myths known to young poets of the early thirteenth century, even though they were Christians.

Edda and the Eddas

The Old Norse word *edda* is confusing, because it can mean several different things, and this reflects aspects of the reception of early Icelandic literature by Icelanders themselves. Modern scholars are confident that the Old Icelandic noun *edda* was used in the Middle Ages to refer to a prosimetrical work on poetics and mythology composed by the Icelander Snorri Sturluson in the early thirteenth century (see below), because one early fourteenth-century manuscript, the Uppsala codex DG 11, calls his work *edda*, although we do not know exactly what the connotations of this term were for the medieval Icelanders who used it.

Until the early seventeenth century, Icelanders used the term *edda* to refer to Snorri's work alone or to later versions based upon it. However, from this time a view grew up in Iceland, probably first promoted by Jón Guðmundsson the Learned (d. 1658) (Einar G. Pétursson 1998: 1, 49), that the early twelfth-century historian Sæmundr Sigfússon the Wise, whose works survive only by reputation, had compiled a collection of old mythological and heroic poems, some of which Snorri had quoted in his *Edda*. So when the antiquarian Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–75) obtained a small manuscript containing such poetry, now referred to as the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (see below), he immediately identified this with the old compilation of poetry in eddic metres that Icelandic scholars thought Sæmundr the Wise had put together. There is no evidence to support this view, but the name has stuck, and scholars now refer to the Poetic (or Elder) Edda when they mean the poetry in the Codex Regius manuscript and other similar collections, and the Prose (or Younger) Edda, to refer to Snorri Sturluson's work.

From the time in the seventeenth century when Icelandic scholars began to make their older literature available to the wider world, usually in Latin trans-

lation, European writers and intellectuals often used the term *edda* in their own writings, but not always consistently. To some extent they were reflecting the ambiguous use of the term by Icelanders and reproducing it in their own work. For example, the Dane P. H. Resen's edition of 1665 (Faulkes 1977) was titled *Edda Islandorum* (it was an augmented version of Snorri's *Edda*), to which he added separate editions of the mythological poems *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, each of which he presented as *pars Eddæ Sæmundi* ('part of the Edda of Sæmundr'). The remaining mythological and heroic poems of the Codex Regius collection were not published in full by the Arnamagnæan Commission in Copenhagen until 1787–1828, so the educated readers of Europe only gradually became aware that there was a difference between the two 'eddas'. The notion that Sæmundr the Wise compiled the Poetic Edda continued for a long time into the nineteenth century and was endorsed by the authoritative Arnamagnæan edition, with its title *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* ('The Edda of Sæmundr the Wise') and its introductory biography of Sæmundr by Árni Magnússon. The publication of the full corpus of eddic poetry thus coincided with the full-blown European Romantic interest in early Norse religion and mythology, but the difference between Snorri's *Edda* on the one hand, and eddic poetry on the other, was still obscured in many peoples' minds, with the result that one often finds writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries referring to 'the Edda' or 'the Eddas', by which they may mean both Eddas or sometimes only one. This confused usage is necessarily reflected in some of the chapters in this volume that deal with the reception of Old Norse myth and religion during the period of the Enlightenment through to the Romantics and sometimes beyond.

The Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda

This title refers to a particular manuscript, with the siglum GKS 2365 4to, which is now in the Árni Magnússon Collection (Árnasafn) in the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. It is a small quarto vellum, usually dated to *c.* 1270, that contains thirty-one poems on mythological and heroic subjects in eddic metres. Some of these were quoted in part by Snorri Sturluson in his *Edda*. Other manuscripts exist that give versions of some of these poems, but the Codex Regius collection is unique and very valuable for our knowledge of the pre-Christian religions of the North, because, though the manuscript was compiled in the Christian era, its contents seem to reflect a pre-Christian mindset for the most part, although Christian influence on certain poems, especially *Vǫluspá*, has been proposed (cf. Gunnell and Lassen 2013).

Knowledge of the Codex Regius poems and the manuscript itself seems to have gone underground in Iceland from the later Middle Ages until the codex came to light in the 1640s. It is unknown from where it came into Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson's hands, although it is thought that it may have come from either the west or the north of the island (*ÍF Edd.*: I, 19). Bishop Brynjólfur sent it to the king of Denmark in 1662, and it became part of the old royal collection in the Royal Library in Copenhagen, hence its designation as Codex Regius, 'codex of the king'. It remained there until it was returned to Iceland in April 1971.

Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*

Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) was an Icelandic chieftain, historian, mythographer and poet. Aside from his *Edda* (usually dated to *c.* 1222–25), which is securely attributed to him, he probably wrote *Heimskringla*, a history of the kings of Norway, and may also have written *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Although the significance of the name *Edda* for his treatise is uncertain, it is thought likely to mean 'Poetics', and this is a fitting name for a work that deals both with the diction and metrics of poetry, particularly skaldic verse, and the pre-Christian mythology that underpins much Old Norse poetry. In its fullest manuscript versions, Snorri's *Edda* comprises four parts: a Prologue, which explains how the pre-Christian religion of Scandinavia came about and how Christians should understand it; a mythographical part, called *Gylfaginning* ('The Tricking of Gylfi'), which sets out the pre-Christian Scandinavian worldview; a third section on the diction of skaldic poetry, *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Speech of Poetry'), which also narrates a number of Norse myths; and a fourth part, *Háttatal* ('List of Verse-Forms'), concerned with metrics. A fuller analysis of the contents and the central importance of this work to the reception of the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia is to be found in Part 2, Chapters 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below.

Names of Norse Gods and Other Entities

The present volume covers a huge time span, from late antiquity to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and even later in some chapters. This makes it difficult to make consistent choices in the forms of names and other key terms relating to the pre-Christian religions of the North and to Norse myths. On the whole, names of gods, mythological places and other terms represented in medieval Norse texts, mainly Icelandic, are presented in standard Old Icelandic spelling in Parts 1 and 2, which is normalized to the period between

1200 and 1250, a time when many of the medieval texts referred to were probably composed. However, chapters covering later periods use the forms of these names that the early modern authors themselves used, inflected as they usually were for the relevant modern European language. The list below gives some of the most commonly occurring names, their Old Norse-Icelandic spellings and equivalent spellings in Modern English and other modern European languages.

Old Norse Spelling	**Commonly Used Modern Equivalent**
Baldr	Balder
Bragi	Brage, Braga
Freyja	Freya, Freja
Freyr	Frey
Frigg	Frigga
Iðunn	Idunn, Iduna
Loki	Loke
Njǫrðr	Njord, Njörd
Óðinn	Odin, Oden, Wodan, Wotan
Þórr	Thor, Tor
Æsir	Aesir, Aeser
ragnarǫk, *ragnarök**	Ragnarok
Valhǫll, Valhöll	Valhalla, Walhalla
valkyrja (pl. *valkyrjur*)	valkyrie, valkyries, Walküre

* *Ragnarøkr* is the form in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*.

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Part 1

Looking In:
The Non-Scandinavian Perspective

1.0 – Introduction to Part 1

Margaret Clunies Ross

The religions of pre-Christian Scandinavia left their mark on the European and (in some cases) the Asian peoples with whom Scandinavians came into contact from prehistoric times and into the early Middle Ages. The extent and depth of the external reception whose traces we can retrieve today depends on several factors, the chief of which are whether the society in contact with Scandinavia was literate, the ease (or otherwise) with which people felt able to record what they observed and also whether the observation was made contemporaneously with the events or beliefs described or long afterwards, as was often the case. We must also distinguish between direct, overt interpretative reception in written texts and the kinds of indirect reception that we find in modern languages like Finnish that were not written down in the medieval period, but where the names of certain gods and their attributes appear to be parallel to those of some Scandinavian deities. Such parallels do not in themselves constitute an explicit reception, which involves a conscious recognition of an alien custom or belief, but they probably provide evidence of religious influence from one society to another.

The extent of a society's ability to write was obviously crucial in determining whether contemporary or near-contemporary records could be made about the pre-Christian religions of Europe in the early centuries AD. Literacy using the Roman alphabet was generally spread along with Christianity to the various societies of Western Europe, and the chronology of that technological reception thus depended on the time period during which the various societies converted to the new religion. Ironically, the earlier and more thorough the conversion, as with the Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, the less likely the converted society was to record evidence of its own pre-Christian religion and mythology, at least directly. There were ways and means of recording some kinds of

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information about the old customs, through the rationalization of euhemerism, for example,[1] but direct accounts of pre-Christian religions from within those societies that held such beliefs are rare. There are two reasons why medieval Scandinavian writers recorded reasonably substantial accounts of their ancestors' beliefs and customs: their relatively late conversion to Christianity and their physical distance from the centre of Western Christendom in Rome, which allowed them to preserve the most highly valued of their native traditions, particularly as preserved in vernacular poetry.

Some accounts of Scandinavian pre-Christian religious practices antedate the general Christian conversion of Western Europe and were composed by non-Christians looking in on an alien culture. These notably include classical historians like Julius Caesar and Tacitus (see Chapter 1.1). A few records stem from Muslim rather than Christian observers, notably those accounts given in the section below on Arabic sources (Chapter 1.6). However, most evidence for the early reception of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion comes from European peoples who were themselves already Christian, observing and passing judgement on Scandinavians as heathens, and this perspective must always be remembered when weighing the value of the evidence of early non-Scandinavian sources.

Another important factor that influenced the nature and extent of the evidence for the reception of ideas about the pre-Christian religions of the North is the degree of familiarity the receiving society actually had with early Scandinavia or with Scandinavians abroad. In many cases, classical and Arabic ethnographers had little if any direct contact with the religious practices of those whose behaviour and beliefs they were representing, and they often tended to adopt stereotypes of certain cultural behaviours that were based on their own prejudices rather than on direct observation or experience. Particular topics, including the Scandinavians' sexual mores and funeral practices, occur in the works of many writers and are sometimes likely to be the result of literary borrowing rather than independent, empirically based observation. To a somewhat lesser extent, Christian missionary narratives suffer from similar disadvantages, although most of them claim to be (and sometimes were) based on first-hand observation of Northern peoples who were still pagan and whom the missionaries were trying to convert. The strongly Christian colouring of these narratives has to be taken into account when assessing the information they provide about pre-Christian religious practices and beliefs.

[1] See Chapter 2.1.1 below for a discussion of euhemerism.

Another way of recognizing the different mindsets and approaches of various types of reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North (and this is true for later examples as well as those from the late antique and early medieval period) is to recognize the literary genres to which such descriptions belong, because it can then be possible to identify the various standard topics and approaches they employ. The genre of ethnography, to which Tacitus's *Germania* and Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān's *risālah* ('report') both belong, usually covers topics that include the foreign people's physical appearance and strange customs, including their religion, while missionary narratives will usually contain set descriptions of the heathen people's religious cults and places of worship, as well as documenting the missionaries' attempts, successful or otherwise, to convert them to Christianity. Different again are the several strategies adopted by medieval historians wishing to explain the existence of non-Christian religions, particularly among the ancestors of their own people, while not wishing to condemn their ancestors among the damned in the Christian Hell. And finally, there are some who represent beliefs in the old Scandinavian gods as delusions produced by the Christians' Satan (see Chapter 2.1.3 below).

The following six chapters present evidence for the reception and awareness of the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia among a diverse group of non-Scandinavian peoples. On the one hand, there are the reports of classical military leaders, historians and chroniclers writing in Latin; on the other, we have some reports from the middle of the ninth century onward from Arab travel writers observing Scandinavians active as traders in western Russia and the Ukraine. Still other kinds of information can be extracted from documentary and archaeological evidence of Finnish, Sámi, Slavic, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic interactions with Scandinavian peoples and the possible influences of pre-Christian Scandinavian religions upon them.

These chapters vary considerably in length, depending on the amount and nature of the evidence there is to account for. Their authors adopt a properly sceptical approach to that evidence and frequently admit that the sources that have often been considered reliable by earlier writers in providing evidence of pre-Christian Scandinavian cults and myths are suspect in some way, whether because of their late date, their second-hand status, their literary stylization or the nebulousness of the information they do provide. The reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North evidenced here is revisionist and is based on a sifting of the sources — textual, linguistic and archaeological — that bear on this subject. The net result in some cases will disappoint some readers who are hoping for rich pickings, as for example among the Irish, the Anglo-Saxons and the Finno-Ugric peoples, but in others, where archaeology can throw light on

both native sources and those from Scandinavia itself, as in Chapter 1.5 on the reception in Old Rus', a certain amount of fairly reliable information emerges, and this chimes well with Jan Retsö's careful evaluation of Ibn Faḍlān's famous account of the Rus' living along the River Volga in the tenth century.

1.1 – Pictured by the Other: Classical and Early Medieval Perspectives on Religions in the North

Henrik Janson

Until the early twelfth century, written evidence for the religions of the North comes almost exclusively from depictions in sources from outside Scandinavia. Only from AD 1100 onwards does domestic history writing begin to evolve, and a literary production develops that describes the Scandinavian North from within. Before that time, however, the North of Europe was a foreign world to written sources.

Contacts between the Baltic Sea area and the regions producing the first written ethnographical information about Europe are old. Homer had already spoken about the precious amber, which had been a important means of contact with the Baltic in the Bronze Age (Homer, *Odyssey* XV. 459–60, XVIII. 295–96; cf. Czebreszuk 2013; Murillo-Barosso and Martinón-Torres 2012: 188, 197–200), but to Herodotus in the fifth century BC, the northern parts of Europe, from where he knew the amber came, were far beyond the horizon of reliable information (Herodotus III. 115–16).

Two hundred years later Apollonius of Rhodes, head of the famous library of Alexandria, wrote that the Celts (*Κελτοί*) — a concept then still of vague ethnographic significance — maintained, contradicting a Mediterranean story, that amber was formed from the tears of Apollo, shed when, in ancient times, he was expelled from heaven to 'the sacred race of Hyperboreans' (*Υπερβορέων*

Henrik Janson is Associate Professor, docent and Deputy Head of the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Gothenburg. He specializes in Viking Age and early medieval Scandinavian history in its European context.

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ἱερὸν γένος). Since Apollonius's words actually seem to reflect knowledge, perhaps stemming from Pytheas of Massilia's slightly older but now lost work (cf. Weibull 1934: 83–84; Horst Roseman 1994: 94–95) about how amber was actually found — it was carried, he explains, by the ocean streams and washed to the shore by the tide — there might perhaps be some local relevance to the story (Apollonius, *Argonautica* IV. 592–626).

Other sources also indicate a special relationship of the 'Hyperboreans' to Apollo, and to the Artemis temple on the Greek island of Delos, where both Apollo and his twin sister Artemis were allegedly born. According to Herodotus, two Hyperborean maidens, Hyperoche and Laodike, had their tomb under an olive tree 'on the left hand when one enters into the sanctuary' on Delos (cf. Seltmann 1928: 156; cf. Sale 1961; Beck et al. 1968: 17–18; Kowalzig 2007: 118–23). They had been sent from the Hyperboreans together with an escort of five Hyperborean men — 'those namely who are now called Perphereës "the carriers" and have great honours paid to them in Delos' — to bring tribute for speedy birth; but the girls had died on Delos, and therefore the Hyperboreans in Herodotus's time did not bring over the offerings themselves, but

> the sacred offerings bound up in wheat straw are carried from the land of the Hyperboreans and come to the Scythians, and then from the Scythians the neighbouring nations in succession receive them and convey them Westwards, finally as far as the Adriatic: thence they are sent forward towards the South, and the people of Dodona receive them first of all the Hellenes, and from these they come down to the Malian gulf and are passed over to Euboea, where city sends them on to city till they come to Carystos. After this Andros is left out, for the Carystians are those who bring them to Tenos, and the Tenians to Delos. (Herodotus IV.33–35)

Herodotus also mentions that before these two girls there had been two other Hyperborean girls, Arge and Opis, who had come 'with the divinities themselves' for the same reason (Herodotus IV.35). This information obviously comes from Delos. Herodotus himself seems to have doubted the existence of the Hyperboreans (Herodotus IV.36). The Scythians had said nothing about them (Herodotus IV.32). Modern scholarship has also had a hard time identifying this mythic and utopian society, and it has been located in several places from the Black Sea region and Mediterranean world to the British Isles (with the supposed temple of Apollo at Stonehenge), or somewhere in between. The first mention in written sources, however, by Hesiod around 700 BC, does not idealize the Hyperboreans quite as much as later sources do but presents them in connection with amber and the river 'Eridanus', which was also closely related to amber in classical mythography (Skinner 2012: 62–64).

As a concept — perhaps from the Mycenaean period and the more intense contacts of the Bronze Age (cf. Varberg et al. 2015; Kaul 2013: 465–67, 469; Ling and Stos-Gale 2015) — the 'Hyperboreans' of the furthest European North seem in the fifth century BC to have become more or less a purely mythical (or literary) idea, constantly evolving in poetry and still important to some religious cults, like that of Apollo and Artemis on Delos. It definitely seems as if the Hyperboreans were imagined at least by then as an integrated part of the religious community of Hellas (Skinner 2012: 229–30).

The Roman expansion brought big changes to the political and cultural relations of Europe, and indeed a decrease in knowledge about the North. Caesar introduced a fictitious sharp distinction between Germans and Celts (Wells 1995; Lampinen 2011: 204–05, 213–18), and the famous geographer Strabo, in the Augustan-Tiberian age, advocated the idea that barbarity increased with distance from the Roman world (Horst Roseman 2005: 33). To get this theoretical worldview to fit, Strabo had to brusquely reject as fabrications the empirical observations made by Pytheas of Massilia at the height of Hellenistic culture, around 325 BC. In doing so he created much confusion for later generations, especially since Pytheas's work was later lost, something that caused tremendous damage to our knowledge about Northern Europe in the Hellenistic era (Horst Roseman 1994).

In his *Naturalis Historia* from *c*. 77 AD, Pliny the Elder, in what might perhaps be a reflection of Pytheas's work, speaks of the Hyperboreans in a way that seems to show that this name was still functional when referring to the inhabitants of southern Scandinavia and the southern Baltic (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*: VI.219–20; cf. Strabo, *Geogr*. VII.3.1; Horst Roseman 1994: 69–73). But Pliny the Elder also brought in new information on the topic when mentioning for the first time the name Scatinavia. He explains it to be one of twenty-three islands 'known to the Roman arms' in the huge gulf called Codanus, that is, the Baltic Sea, which began at the *promunturium Cimbrorum* ('the promontory of the Cimbrians'), that is, Jutland, and Tastris, that is, Skagen. Scatinavia was, according to Pliny, the most famous of these twenty-three islands, but its size was as yet unknown. It had been noticed that a part of it was inhabited by the *Hilleviones gente* — perhaps a scribal error for *illa Svionum gente* — with their five hundred cantons (*pagi*) (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*: IV.96–97; Svennung 1974: 57–59, 81–91; cf. Grane 2012).

New information had apparently become available, and the source has been identified as the report from Drusus the Elder's naval expedition to the North in the year 12 BC (Austin and Rankov 1995: 119), or more likely from the expedition into *Germania* under Tiberius's command in 5 AD (Grane 2007: 8–9),

but it might also have been some decades later (Weibull 1934: 85–93). Pliny has, however, no information on religious conditions, other than mentioning that the island is called 'another world' (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*: IV.96), which might be a reference to the utopian Hyperborean world which the classical tradition claimed was impossible for mortals to reach.

Two decades later the Roman senator, high-ranking official and state priest Tacitus visualized these parts of Europe when he wrote his *Germania* (98 AD), a work that has been characterized as one of the most dangerous books ever written on account of its role in later European history (Momigliano 1966: 112–13; cf. Krebs 2011). Tacitus had no personal experience of these non-Roman 'Germanic' parts of Europe, as Pliny the Elder had at least of the border area, and he was not driven by the same scientific curiosity (Perl 1990: 38–39). Instead his *Germania* was largely built on older ethnographic conventions and used common ethnographic *topoi* larded with arresting exotic details to promote Roman politics (Norden 1923; Weibull 1934: 96–105; Lund 1990; Perl 1990: 32–42; Städele 1993; Krebs 2010; Krebs 2011: 42–50; Lampinen 2011).

Especially since the catastrophic defeat of the Romans in the Teutoburger forest in 9 AD, the population across the river Rhine, then generally bundled together under the name Germani, was both fascinating and provocative to Rome. Tacitus himself was an outspoken Roman expansionist. He promoted the idea that the growth of the Roman Empire should not stop before it reached the ultimate ends of the earth, and the Germani, therefore, served as a bad example for other peoples because they were living in freedom from Rome (Perl 1990: 14–15). Beneath Tacitus's *Germania*, therefore, there lay an argument for Roman conquest, perhaps a message directed at the new emperor Trajan himself, and the text was not primarily about Germania but about Rome (O'Gorman 1993; von See 1994: 37; Krebs 2010; Krebs 2011: 49–50; Rives 2012). The ethnographic descriptions were mirrors in which the Romans could see themselves. The ancient virtues of Rome were displayed and recalled in order to confront the Germani, among whom these virtues served to enhance the provocative character of barbarian freedom.

Germania is a text strictly organized in accordance with its author's literary objectives (Perl 1990: 43; O'Gorman 2012; Krebs 2011: 45), and this is also true of the places where it enters into depictions of religion. An example is when it describes how seven Northern groups of the Suebi worship *terra mater* ('mother earth'). Tacitus places this cult, on which he seems surprisingly well informed, in a sacred grove on an island in the Ocean (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 40). The goddess is referred to by an exotic name, Nerthus, or, according to some

readings, Hertha.[1] To the Roman audience of Tacitus's text, however, this name made little difference. To them *terra mater*, that is, *tellus* ('the earth itself') (Le Bonniec 1958: 48–52; Spaeth 1996: 135), was the object of, and a symbol for, the prosperous empire of the Roman state (Strong 1937; cf. Galinsky 1992), and when Tacitus describes a special priest overseeing the goddess's transportation in a cart drawn by cows in a procession ending with a lavation, these were features well known to his Roman audience as part of a ceremony in which *magna mater* ('the great mother'), symbolizing noble Roman power (Le Bonniec 1958: 365–67; Speath 1996: 96; Borgeaud 2004: 91, 173 n. 132), was driven, like Nerthus, in a cart pulled by cows through the streets of Rome. The procession culminated in a *lavatio* at the place where the rivulet Almo flows into the River Tiber (Stuart 1916: 119–21; Bickel 1934: 8–13; Perl 1990: 240; von See 1994: 34–35; Borgeaud 2004: 64–65). With the words *Hertha/Nerthus, id est terra mater* ('Hertha/Nerthus, that is mother earth') Tacitus consequently brings the provocative freedom of Germania into direct confrontation with the *Pax Romana*, with the Roman state and Roman religious cults in tribute to the victorious Roman Empire of which he himself was actually a responsible member, being one of the distinguished priests in the *collegium* of the *Quindecim viri sacris faciundis* ('The fifteen men for the performance of sacred rites') (Perl 1990: 240).

Moving from generalities to this kind of more specific information about particular tribal groups, Tacitus initially makes some statements about the habits of the Germani as a whole. In ancient songs, which, he claims, are their only form of recorded history, they celebrate the memory of Tuisto or Tuisco — a god (*deus*) born by earth — and his son Mannus, as the original founder of their breed. To the latter they assign three sons whose names are to be found in the names of three different branches of the Germani (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 2). He says nothing about cult and worship of these figures. However, the greatest hero among the Germani is said to be Hercules, who had once stayed among them, and they praise him with songs when going to battle (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 3). They appease him and Mars with sacrificed animals, but the most worshipped among the gods is Mercury, to whom it is even lawful to sacrifice humans on certain days (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 9).

[1] The manuscripts offer the variants *nertum*, *necthum*, *neithum*, *herthum*, *Neherthum*, *Verthum*, and, since Jacob Grimm, the form *Nerthum* has been preferred due to its relation to the Old Norse name, Njǫrðr, but as Allan A. Lund has pointed out, the form [*H*]*ertha* would have the advantage of being linked to the Germanic word for *terra* ('earth'), ModEngl. *earth*, ModGer. *Erde* (Lund 2007: 306–07).

Since the advent of Romanticism much effort has been invested in trying to connect these names with names of gods in the Germanic languages found in later, mainly Old Norse sources. The guiding idea has been that Tacitus is here mainly practising an *interpretatio romana*, that is, interpreting foreign gods as domestic, Roman gods. Through the methodology of comparative religion scholars have found it a feasible claim that what Tacitus actually refers to is Wodan/Óðinn, Donar/Þórr, Tiwaz/Týr and so forth, which, if correct, would date these deities more than a thousand years before they appear in Old Norse literature. However, systematic studies in contemporary source material — votive inscriptions by Germanic-speaking individuals in the late Roman era — have persuasively shown that these Germanic names, and consequently these gods, were not known at this time, nor do any other 'pan-Germanic' gods seem to have been, even if, in accordance with Tacitus's information, the worship of Mercury was more widespread along the Rhine than that of other gods. However, instead of the *interpretatio romana* attributed to Tacitus, there seems to have been an *interpretatio germanica* in play, going in the opposite direction, transforming Roman gods but yet not knowing the names of gods we meet in later sources (e.g., Derks 1998; Shaw 2007: 393–95; cf. Shaw 2011). This would also fit with the fact that Tacitus actually says that the Hercules that the Germani honour is the Graeco-Roman Hercules whom they claimed had once stayed among them (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 3), and with the statement that Ulysses (*Odysseus*) had once been driven ashore on the coast of Germania, where he is said to have founded Asciburgium on the banks of the Rhine, and where once an altar was discovered, consecrated by him in the name of his father Laertes (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 3).

The picture presented by the votive offerings also seems to show that religious communities were quite local, and, if that is in fact the case, Tacitus is not much help for students of Old Norse religion. He does mention the Cimbri (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 37), supposedly living in Jutland (cf. however Weibull 1934 and 1940), and the societies of the Suiones, who are said to dwell *in ipso Oceano* ('in the Ocean itself') (Tacitus, *Germ.*: 44), but in these cases he gives no information about religious conditions, and in subsequent centuries silence largely prevails in the sources about these parts of Europe.

Around 200 AD, however, Tertullian made the grand claim that the peoples of the whole ancient world had come to believe in Jesus, as had the Spaniards, the nations of the Gauls, the Britons (inaccessible to the Romans but subjugated to Christ), the Sarmatians, Dacians, Germani, and Scythians 'and many remote nations, provinces, and islands, many unknown to us, which we can scarcely enumerate. In all these places Christ's name, which has already arrived,

rules, since to him all the city gates are open and none are closed' (Tertullian, *Adv. Iudaeos*: VII.4–5; cf. Pentz 2007). This enthusiastic account may, however, be somewhat exaggerated because Tertullian's slightly younger contemporary Origen writes that there were still very many (*plurimi*) among the Britons, the Germani who live around the Ocean, the Barbarians (*sic*), Dacians, Sarmatians and Scythians who had not yet been reached by the Word (Origen, 'Commentaria in ... Matthæum': §39, col. 1655).

In the following centuries the collective concept 'Germani' largely disappears from the sources, and most invaders of the Roman West in the fifth and sixth centuries are not referred to as Germani but by other names (Goffart 2009: 187–229; Janson 2013: 9–24). After the appearance of the Huns in the Balkans in the fourth century, followed by the Gothic exodus from the Black Sea region and subsequent invasions of West Roman territory in the fifth, Procopius, writing for the aristocracy of the Byzantine Empire in the middle of the sixth century, described Scandinavia under the name Thule, a concept earlier introduced to classical geography by Pytheas of Massilia (Weibull 1934: 83–84). Procopius did not share Tacitus's idealizing tendencies. He showed nothing but contempt for the barbarians, and he seems to follow the model of Strabo, with these peoples' degree of civilization falling rapidly with their distance from Rome, in his case the new Rome, Constantinople. Farthest away were the thirteen nations of Thule of which the Scrithiphinoi, often identified as the Sámi people, are said to 'live a kind of life akin to that of the beasts' (cf. O'Gorman 2012: 117–18). The rest of the 'barbarians' in Thule did not differ very much 'from the rest of men', but they reverenced 'gods and demons' in great numbers. They brought them all kinds of sacrifices, and made oblations to the dead, but the noblest of sacrifices was the first human being that they captured in war. He was sacrificed to Ares, 'whom they regard as the greatest god'. They hanged him, threw him into thorns or killed him in some other cruel way (Procopius, *Wars*: VI,14, 4–26).

It is hard to say what might actually lie behind this distant description, but an indication can be found in a passage in which Procopius describes how the Franks, or 'the Germans' as he calls them, surprisingly attacked the Goths in 539 and even slaughtered Gothic women and children. They threw their bodies into the river as 'first-fruits of war', because, he says, even if these barbarians 'have become Christians', they 'preserve the greater part of their ancient religion, for they still make human sacrifices and other sacrifices of an unholy nature' (Procopius, *Wars*: VI, 25, 9–11). What is here seen from the point of view of a socially superior (imperial) point of view as human sacrifice, were obviously the victims of 'barbarian' war and aggression, and such sacrifices

could even, at least from an aristocratic Byzantine perspective, be performed by 'barbarian' Christians.

In part Procopius built on the same sources as his contemporary Jordanes, writing in 551 AD, and there is some likelihood that some of the information may point in the direction of the Byzantine diplomat Priscus in the mid-fifth century (Alonso-Núñez 1987). Jordanes, however, saw a connection between Scandinavia and the 'Goths' (Goffart 1988: 84–111 and 2009: 56–72; Søby Christensen 2002: 250–300; Coumert 2007: 33–142). In the sixth century this link was between Scandinavia and the regions around the mouth of the Danube, the East Roman province of Scythia (*minor*), and the 'Gothic' or 'Scythian' church of Tomis (Janson 2011: 51–53). In this perspective Scandinavia was not a part of Germania (Alonso-Núñez 1987: 7; Janson 2011: 46–49). Instead it now became integrated into the concept of *Scythia* (Janson 2011: 46–49). Around 700 AD the anonymous geographer of Ravenna referred to geographers (cf. Wood 2007: 61–62) that identified the island Scandza as *Scythia antiqua* ('Old Scythia'), indicating some kind of imagined Gothic connection between *Scythia minor* and Scandinavia, *Scythia antiqua*, probably along similar lines to Jordanes, who thought the Goths of the Black Sea region had emigrated from Scandinavia in ancient times (Goffart 1988: 110 n. 395; Janson 2011: 53).

Political turmoil in the Balkans in the seventh and eighth centuries silenced the eastern references to Scandinavia, but instead an important new perspective developed in the written sources, that of the Frankish Empire, which was to invent much of the modern picture of the Late Iron Age North. If the sources of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages in the East had left very little explicit information about the religious conditions of the North, this new perspective was totally focused on religion. It was shaped by a rich hagiographic literature, which depicted the lives of monks from the British Isles, who travelled to the Continent as *peregrini pro Christo* ('pilgrims on behalf of Christ'). This literature imposed an elevated moral position and an unquestionable legitimacy on its royal Frankish sponsors in comparison with neighbouring groups. The first of these monks came from Ireland, and already in the early 640s Jonas de Bobbio wrote the life of the most famous of these Irish saints, St Columbanus (Bullough 1997; Wood 2001: 31–35).

This text came to be very influential on later Frankish hagiography (O'Hara 2009), and it is important in this connection because it is the first text that mentions a deity named Vodan. Jonas describes a miracle performed by Columbanus around 610. Columbanus had left his religious community in Bangor in Ireland around 590, and soon afterwards he appeared at Continental royal courts and gained their support. Backed by the Merovingian king

Theudebert II, Columbanus entered the border region around Lake Constance with the slightly expansionist ambition of 'sowing the faith' among the neighbouring people of the Suevi. Travelling around in the area, he intervened in a gathering of both baptized and unbaptized Suevi, who, according to Jonas de Bobbio fifty years later, prepared a large vessel of beer and wanted to honour 'their god named Vodan, whom according to others they call Mercurius' (for the translation, see Shaw 2002: 120). The saint now blew on the barrel, and it broke into pieces (Jonas de Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*: I, 27, 213).

A problem with this important source is that, like so many early medieval texts, it is preserved only in much later manuscripts, and, since this equation of Vodan and Mercurius is not to be found in the oldest manuscript from the ninth century, it is likely that it is a later addition (cf. Jonas de Bobbio: 159 n. 9; Bullough 1997: 19 n. 59). Around 800 Vodan/Wodan/Godan had become a famous pagan god equated to Mercurius, not least through Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* ('History of the Lombards') from *c*. 790, and this might well have caused a copyist to insert this additional information.

However, already long before Paul the Deacon two different sources on Lombard history, almost as old as the *Vita Columbani*, had told a story about how a certain Wodan/Godan gave the Longobardi 'Long-beards' their name. The chronicler Fredegar, who seems to have the oldest variant, says that the Lombards originated in Scathanavia, 'which is between the Danube and the Ocean'. They crossed the Danube with their wives and children and confronted the Huns. With the intention of making their force appear more numerous, their women let their hair down around their faces to make themselves look like men. A voice was then heard from heaven saying: 'These are the Longobardi'. According to Fredegar 'these peoples' claimed that this was the voice of their God, 'whom they fanatically call (*fanatice nominant*) Wodanus'. After the voice had been heard, the Longobardi shouted that he who had given them their name should also give them victory (Fredegar III.65).

Fredegar, a Catholic Burgundian under Frankish rule who used the *Vita Columbani* as a source of information, wrote his work in the middle of the seventh century, when the Lombards were still commonly known to follow the despised 'gentile' Arian form of Christianity. They were usually believed to have been Arian Christians already when they first appeared in the Danubian vicinities of the Roman Empire in the late fifth century (Scardigli 1992: 426–29; Brown 2009: 293–95; cf. Bullough 1997: 23 n. 72 and Pohl 2000a: 50–53; Everette 2003: 98). Procopius mentions them at that point in time as one party in an encounter very similar to the one depicted by Fredegar between the Longobardi and the Huns, also mentioning signs in heaven that indicated a sur-

prising Lombard victory, but that conflict was with the Heruls, not the Huns as in Fredegar's story (Procopius, *Wars*: VI, 14, 12–22).

The actors in the name-giving event could vary, however. Perhaps contemporarily with Fredegar, but more likely somewhat later (Mommsen 1880; Everett 2003: 92–98, 320–21; Coumert 2007: 157–66, 197–214; cf. Pohl 2000b and Goffart 2009: 288 n. 34), an anonymous work named *Origo gentis Langobardorum* ('The Origin of the Lombard People'), preserved in three manuscripts from around 1000 AD, tells the story about the name-giving in a quite different way. The Lombards are also here said to have resided originally in Scandinavia, *Scadanan* — 'which means destruction' — in the northern parts of the world where many peoples lived. One small group of these was the Winnili. At an unspecified time and location they confronted the Vandals, who tried to make them tributaries. The Vandals, famous as the most insistent of Arian Christians, in that situation asked Godan (it is not specified who this was) to give them victory, but he said that he would give the victory to whomever he saw first next morning. The Winnils, led by the woman Gambara, then asked Frea (one manuscript calls her 'the wife of Godan') to be favourable to them. Frea came up with the idea that the Winnil women should arrange their hair around their faces to look like bearded men. At sunrise she turned the bed of Godan around so that he looked east when he woke up. He then said: 'Who are these *longobarbae*?' Upon this Frea replied that he should now give the victory to those to whom he had given their name (*Origo gentis Langobardorum*: 2–3).

When the Lombard Paul the Deacon wrote his *Historia Langobardorum* around 790, the Lombard kingdom had recently (774) been conquered by the Franks. The Lombards had by then been Christians for generations. The pre-Christian religion and its language and cult had been given up long ago. Indeed, if such a thing as a particular Germanic Lombard language had ever existed, it had, with the exception of some legal and military terminology, been thoroughly forgotten in Paul's time (Everett 2003: 100–29).

Paul was heavily dependent on *Origo gentis Langobardorum*. Reluctantly he also retells its story about how the Lombards received their name from Godan and Frea, but he calls it a silly fable and emphasises that victory is not given through the power of humans, but is bestowed from heaven (Paul the Deacon: I.8). He concludes:

> Wodan, whom by adding a letter they called Godan, is indeed he who among the Romans is named Mercury, and who is worshipped by all the peoples of Germania (*ab universis Germaniae gentibus*) as a god (*ut deus*), though he did not live around these times, but long before, and not in Germania, but in Greece. (Paul the Deacon I.9)

These words about the peoples of Germania who all worship Wodan/Mercurius seem to echo the words *deorum maxime Mercurium colunt* ('of the gods they worship Mercury most'), in Tacitus's *Germania* (Borri 2011: 228 n. 23; cf. Innes 2000: 237–38; Coumert 2007: 169; Huth 2008), and Paul the Deacon might even be a likely suspect to have brought the *Germania* to the Carolingian north. Be that as it may, Paul points to a crucial aspect of the 'fable' as told in the *Origo*: it has Wodan and Frea act as humans, that is, they had been euhemerized.[2]

The euhemerized Wodan also appears among the Anglo-Saxons in the British Isles, where he is found in regnal lists as a human forefather to Anglo-Saxon royal dynasties. From his very first appearance in Anglo-Saxon literature Woden is a mere convention used by the clergy to signal noble or royal ancestry, and the name seems by then to have already lost all alleged attributes of a deity (Dumville 1977: 78–79; King 1988: 151–53; Canning 1996: 28). The best possible way to dissociate this name from all divine connotations was to make it refer solely to a mortal forefather. Bede (d. 735) uses Woden in this way *c.* 730 (Bede, *Hist. Eccl.* 1.15), and even if Bede's genealogy might have had slightly older predecessors, it was through him that a mighty impact was made on posterity (Shaw 2007: 399 n. 45; cf. Faulkes 2007). It also seems to be in such a learned euhemerizing ecclesiastical context that the Germanic translation of the Latin names of the days of the week originated (Fell 1995: 18; Shaw 2007; Doyle White 2014: 287–91).

At an early stage the Carolingians discovered a new and useful political tool in the zealous Benedictine monks from Anglo-Saxon England, and the entry of these monks into the Merovingian church resulted in a harsh confrontation with what they often characterized as pagan remains and serious Christian aberrations, such as pagans baptizing Christians and Christian priests making animal sacrifices and venerating Jupiter (Setman 1903: 88; Brown 1996: 420). The clash of these hardliners with the Christianities of the early Middle Ages manifested, in the words of Robert A. Markus, 'the end of Ancient Christianity', and it shaped the new Christian world of the Carolingian Empire (Markus 1990: 208–11; Brown 1996; Palmer 2009: 116–44). The narrative was to a

[2] Walter Goffart (1988: 282–86) argues that Godan and Frea as they appear in *Origo* are not euhemerized, and that Paul the Deacon introduces the euhemeristic interpretation in opposition to *Origo*. Even if the words *uxorem Godam* ('the wife of Godan') are later additions, I find this view hard to accept, since the major difference between Fredegar and *Origo* is actually the introduction of the euhemerized Germanic concepts Godan/Wodan and Frea, Latin *Domina* ('Lady').

large extent designed by Bede (Wood 2001: 53, 66, 115) and was manifested pre-eminently through hagiographic texts in which a very clear-cut division was made between the paganism into which these Anglo-Saxon saviours had entered, and the Christianity that they established in the Carolingian Empire. For centuries these sources supported a picture of a very clear-cut, black-and-white distinction between paganism and Christianity, but in the post-colonial era historians have become increasingly more sceptical about the source value of depictions of paganism in these texts (Hen 1995: 154–206; Fletcher 1997: 234–35; Wood 2001: 44; cf. de Jong 2005; Janson 2010; for a defence of a more traditional (even if inverted) colonial view, see Cusack 2011). Sometimes the classification as 'pagan' can even be shown to have been made on purely political grounds and to have concerned people who in reality were perfectly good Christians even according to Frankish standards (cf. Wood 2013: 7).

Through Fredegar and *Origo* the word Wodan/Godan had been connected with the alleged and very foreign Scandinavian origin of the Lombards, and Paul the Deacon followed the same line in his Lombard history. By then, however, Wodan's Scandinavian context had gained immediate political significance. Charlemagne's ferocious war against the Saxons had already forced the Franks into direct contact with the unknown Scandinavian world in the late 770s when the Saxon prince Widukind fled to the territory of the Northmen (*Annales regni Francorum* AD a. 777). Charlemagne, through his ghost writer Peter of Pisa, touched upon these matters when, in a playful poetic correspondence with Paul the Deacon, he asked Paul if he was ready to face the haughty king Sigifrit, 'the man who now holds the impious sceptre over a pernicious realm, and wash him in the sacred spring', meaning the water of baptism. Paul answered that if he tried it would be of little use because Sigifrit's heart had not been enlightened by the Latin language. To Paul, therefore, Sigifrit was nothing but 'a bristly ape or a bearded goat'. Paul, furthermore, did not know King Sigifrit's language, and consequently the king would not grasp and respect what Paul would say from his superior position. However, Sigifrit would fear Charlemagne's name and arms, and perhaps accept baptism on account of the power Heaven had conferred on the Frankish ruler, according to Paul. If he did not show respect, Sigifrit should be brought in front of Charlemagne himself, with his hands tied behind his back. 'Then,' the aristocratic Lombard monk concludes in this poem around 783, 'Thonar and Waten will be of no help to him' (*Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*: I, 51–52).

Paul's words here imply that Sigifrit and the Northmen worshipped Thonar and Waten, but it should be noted that he does not know the words in their Scandinavian form. His information relates instead to the Saxons whom

Charlemagne was fighting. When the Saxons surrendered to the brutal warfare of Charlemagne, and accepted baptism from the Anglo-Saxon Frankish monk-priests, they had to vow in the baptismal ceremony to reject the devil's works and the 'words' Thunaer, Woden, and Saxnote 'and all those fiends that are their companions' (*Capitularia regum Francorum* 1.19; Brunner 2003: 47–48; cf. Dahn 1876: 42). What these names actually represented to the Saxons (and the Northmen) at the time is difficult to tell, but in a rebellious society where the language of apes, still, without guidance of legitimate Christian authorities, tried to capture the world, not only the works of the devil but also 'words' became rebellious and demonic.

It is important to consider the status of language in these interactions. Paul the Deacon regarded Sigifrit as an ape since he lacked knowledge of Latin. By labelling him in this way, he did not think only of the direct means of verbal communication. The Latin language was the core of Latin literacy as a whole, and of the universe of cultural references to Graeco-Roman and Latin-Christian sophistication. It was a learned world which deeply impressed Charlemagne, and of which Paul the Deacon was an aristocrat and a master. Beyond the limits of Latin literacy, the intellectual empire of the Latin alphabet, there were other story worlds and other referential systems, but to Paul, and to the Church of the Carolingian renaissance, these were of no value. Around 840 the same demeaning attitude to the Germanic languages is found in the writings of the Frankish monk Walafrid Strabo, when he hesitantly ventures into reflecting on the word for the House of God, *kyrica*, in his own 'barbarian tongue', that is, *Theotisca* ('Germanic') (cf. Janson 2011: 50–57). Taking this language seriously was a problem. Walafrid is well aware, he says (ch. 7), that he will make himself look ridiculous to those Latin speakers who might read his work, when he compared 'the deformed offspring of apes to the children of emperors' (Walafrid, *Libellus*: 70).

Such were the preconditions when cultural contacts intensified between the Frankish Empire and Scandinavia in the 820s and 830s. From a Frankish perspective, it was a culture of apes that met the culture of emperors, but it was also a land still lost to original sin — a territory ruled by the Devil through mortal desires — against the Empire of Christ. Inside the Empire the demons of destruction and mortal desires, that had been let loose with the Fall of Man, could be suppressed or at least tamed and held in tight rein. In a *capitularium* of 802, for example, Charlemagne demanded severe punishments from the bishops for those who committed incestuous fornication. If the perpetrator did not comply with the bishop's sentence, however, he should be brought before the Emperor himself, who would remember the case of incestuous fornication that a certain Fricco committed against a nun of God: *memores exemplo quod*

de incestis factum est, quod Fricco perpetravit in sanctimoniali dei (*Capitularia regum Francorum* I. 95, n. 33).

It has been noted that the voice of Charlemagne himself can be heard in this capitulary (Ganshof 1963; McKitterick 2009: 261), and the famous case of Fricco's assault on the nun, which the emperor here refers to, is not, as it has often been understood, a earlier judicial case, but a well-known story about how *der Teufel der Unzucht* ('the demon of fornication') battered a nun (Betz 1957: 1597–98). This story is otherwise unknown. It may be that the topic of Fricco was not regarded as suitable to the written word, but a demon by the name of Fricco — whose idol is said to be formed (or imagined, *fingunt*) with a huge erect penis (*priapus*) — appears beside Thor in Adam of Bremen's famous description of the temple at Uppsala in Sweden from the 1070s (Adam IV.26). Adam also claimed that Bishop Egino of Lund, when preaching to the Skara Church in the late 1060s, had cut *opinatissimum simulacrum Fricconis* ('the much fancied likeness of Fricco') to pieces (Adam IV.9). A demon named Fricco is otherwise unknown to written sources, but under the Latin equivalent of Priapus he is used, like Charlemagne's Fricco, to designate problems within the church when Adam of Bremen's contemporary Bishop Benzo of Alba warned King Henry IV against appointing as bishops those priests who adored Priapus (Benzo von Alba, *Sieben Bücher*: 463; cf. Janson 1998: 265).

Within the borders of his own realm Charlemagne could fight such diabolical powers through the ascetic Carolingian Church, as it had been built with the help of Anglo-Saxon monks. Beyond the limits of Charlemagne's empire and the jurisdiction of the Carolingian Church, however, the demonic offspring of original sin still prevailed unrestricted in a world not yet enlightened by the Latin language and liturgy. Devils of old such as Fricco/Priapus could, from the Frankish perspective, freely badger the souls of men. So much was common knowledge in the learned circles around Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, but the intellectuals of the early ninth-century Frankish Empire still had very limited knowledge of the North. Ideas about what envoys would meet there were vague. In the late 820s, Ermoldus Nigellus, in a poem praising the early missionary activities initiated by Louis the Pious in 822–23, claimed that the Danes, whom Archbishop Ebo of Rheims had begun 'to call back' (*revocare*) to the faith, worshipped metal statues of the demons Neptunus, instead of God the father (*Deo*), and Iuppiter, instead of Christ — obviously a way of legitimizing missionary activities by revealing that the Danes did not worship one god alone (*Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*: II, 59–60).

Our prime source for Scandinavia in the ninth century is half a century younger than Ermoldus Nigellus's poem, even if to some extent it reflects the

same events. The Life of Archbishop Ansgar, *Vita Ansgarii*, was written by Ansgar's successor, Archbishop Rimbert of Hamburg-Bremen, *c.* 870 (Schieffer 1986: 511–13; Burkhart 2013). Ebo of Rheims's activities had not reached very far beyond the Frankish border to the Danes in southern Jutland, and in *Vita Ansgarii* (ch. 9) we are told that what triggered intensified activities from the Frankish side around 830 was an embassy from the Sueones to the Frankish emperor Louis the Pious. Among other things this embassy had informed the Emperor that there were *multos in gente sua* ('many among their people') who wished to receive *christianae religionis cultum* ('the cult of the Christian religion'), and even the king was inclined to allow God's priests to reside there if they were found worthy (Rimbert, *Vita Ansgarii*: 30). These are the words of the Sueones as filtered through the language of high-ranking clerics of the Frankish Church. The Sueones most certainly would not have spoken of 'God's priests', but of Frankish priests, and most probably they did not speak of 'the cult of the Christian religion' but rather of services according to Frankish observance. What is clear though from this passage is that there were said to be *multi* ('many') Sueones who were well acquainted with and well disposed towards Christianity even before Ansgar's arrival around 830 (cf. Lindqvist 1926: 257; Holmqvist 1975; Janson 1998: 302 n. 1040).

Rimbert's depiction of Ansgar's visits to the Dani and the Sueones brings us closer to Scandinavian society than written sources had ever allowed us to come to this point, but we hear surprisingly little about all the Christians that were supposed to await Ansgar among the Sueones, even if he managed to establish a small Frankish chapel in Birka. However, there is not much information about the non-Christian religion. Nothing is to be found in this text about Wodan, Frea, Fricco or Thunar. The only time we actually hear about pagan gods is when a man among the Sueones, at the instigation of the Devil, declared that he had taken part *in conventu deorum, qui ipsam terram possidere credebantur* ('a council of gods, who were believed to possess this territory'). They had then sent him to make an announcement to the king and the people. Rimbert presents a suspiciously long quotation of this announcement in direct speech, as if he had it before him as a written text, in Chapters 26 and 27. In short it proclaimed that the gods were disappointed over the decreasing offerings. They had understood that the Sueones wanted a new god, but they were not happy about accepting the Christian God. They suggested instead, by a unanimous decision, that the recently deceased king Erik could be taken up into their *collegium*, that is, counted among the gods. This 'diabolical mandate' had been announced in advance of Ansgar's second arrival among the Sueones in the early 850s, because the Devil had, according

to Rimbert, foreseen that he was coming. This had caused great spiritual confusion. There was already a temple built in honour of King Erik, and they had begun to bring him gifts and offerings. But Ansgar anyway made them officially subscribe to (Frankish) Christianity by means of decisions made at the two separate legal assemblies of the two different parts of the realm (Rimbert, *Vita Ansgarii*: 55–59).

The historical realities behind this description are obscure, and there is really very little information to be gained from *Vita Ansgarii* concerning religious matters in the North in the ninth century. The main reason for this is of course that the text was not written with the intention of providing such information (Wood 1987; Palmer 2004), but to promote, primarily at the important West Frankish monastery of Corbie, the acceptance of Rimbert's claims to certain ecclesiastical rights (Janson 2014). In the century that followed after 870 the sources become silent again on religious conditions in the North. The modern picture of the development after Ansgar has largely followed what Adam of Bremen wrote in the 1070s. According to Adam there was a quick return to paganism in the North after Ansgar's death in 865, and it was only with the renewed strength of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries that Christianity could again be established, but in Sweden paganism prevailed still in his own day.

More contemporary sources give a slightly different picture. In Chapter 33 of *Vita Ansgarii* Rimbert actually says that the Frankish Church was still prospering after Ansgar's death in 865 (Rimbert, *Vita Ansgarii*: 64–65), and around 900 the anonymous author of the Life of Rimbert, *Vita Rimberti*, explained (in Chapters 16 and 20) that Archbishop Rimbert (d. 988) had made several voyages over the sea to Sueonia to visit the (Frankish) churches among the pagans (*Vita Rimberti*: 94–95, 20–21). In 934 the founder of the Ottonian dynasty of the East Frankish Empire, King Henry I, defeated the Danish king Gnupa and made a huge impression on his contemporaries for being the first to subject the Dani and make them tributaries (Liutprand, *Antapodosis*: 76). King Gnupa was also forced to accept baptism, and even Adam of Bremen himself in this connection confuses the picture of a thoroughly pagan landscape when saying that Archbishop Unni of Hamburg-Bremen immediately began 'to ordain priests for every single church in the kingdom of the Danes' (Adam 1.59, cf. Janson 2011: 34–35). A few decades later, in the mid-960s, two contemporary sources seem to vindicate what King Haraldr Gormsson stated on his rune stone in Jelling, namely, that he had made the Danes Christians (*kristna*) (Jacobsen and Moltke 1942: no. 42). One of them, however, the monk Widukind of Corvey, writing before 970, contradicted Haraldr, saying that the Danes had

actually been Christians (*christiani*) since ancient times, but 'none the less', he says, trying to explain the contradiction, 'they served idols with a gentile rite' ('sed nichilominus idolis ritu gentili servientes') (Widukind III.65; cf. Bede, *Hist. Eccl.* II.15; Weber 1987: 116). In the heading of the chapter in question, Widukind, or an almost contemporary copyist, wrote: *De Danis, quomodo Christiani perfecte facti sunt* ('About the Danes, how they were made fully Christian') (Widukind III, list of contents, 87). Again, a century later Adam of Bremen had a much more clear-cut picture, that to some extent captured better what was actually at stake: 'Harold subjected himself to Otto [the Great] and received royal power from him promising to establish *christianitas* in Dania' (Adam II.3). According to the Saxon/Ottonian perspective there could not exist a legitimate political power that did not comply with Otto's power and empire, not to speak of whether this sacred power structure met active opposition or even aggression (Janson 2010). Writing in the second decade of the eleventh century, Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, born in 975, had almost been a contemporary of Haraldr's 'conversion', and he found it a little harder to present such a simplified picture as Adam did. From his perspective the *christianitas* of the Danes was, as he says, 'renovated' through the conversion of King Haraldr. This was needed, according to Thietmar, because the Danes had *antecessorum cultura suorum deviantem* ('deviated from the cult of their forefathers') and by so doing they had exposed themselves to the influence of *dii et demones* ('gods and demons') (Thietmar II.14).

These shifting nuances indicate that the religious situation in ninth- and tenth-century Scandinavia was more complex than Adam of Bremen's general picture reveals. A contributory reason for this is that, from the imperial perspective, political subjugation and Christianisation, obedience and faith, were two sides of the same coin (Janson 1998: 333; Scior 2002: 60–65). In such a strictly juridical perspective there were indeed very sharp borders between paganism and Christianity (Janson 2010), and it was even perfectly possible from this standpoint to become classified as a pagan addicted to pagan cult even if a person considered himself a perfectly good Christian. The distinction was not made on the basis of an individual's own perceptions but with regard to whether that person displayed *obedientia* ('obedience') or *inobedientia* ('disobedience') to the defining power structure (Janson 1998: 269–70, 333–34; Janson 2010; Fraesdorff 2005: 278–80). This was very clearly stated in the 1070s by Pope Gregory VII, in the conflict in which he turned this old imperial principle against the head of the Ottonian-Salian Empire, King Henry IV himself, and against the bishops of the Imperial Church that remained faithful to the King: 'anyone falls into the sin of heathenism [*paganitas*]', he proclaimed,

'who, while claiming that he is a Christian, disdains to obey the apostolic see' (Gregory VII, *Ep. Vag.*: 32; cf. Janson 2010).

It was precisely at the moment when this ground-breaking constitutional conflict, the so-called 'investiture contest', exploded in the face of Europe early in 1076, that Adam of Bremen, *magister* at the cathedral school in Bremen, was finishing his history of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (Janson 1998: 34–39). Adam had come to Bremen in 1066–67, and after Archbishop Adalbert's death in 1072 he had began, under the new archbishop Liemar, to put together a history of the very fragile rights and questionable achievements of the see that Ansgar had left behind. The need for such a work constantly increased, as the papacy around 1070 became more and more eager to tear the Scandinavian world out of the hands of Bremen and the Empire. In the beginning of 1075, when Adam was in the midst of his writing, Archbishop Liemar was both excommunicated and depicted as a worshipper of idols by Gregory VII because of his loyalty to Henry IV and his disobedience towards the apostolic see. As the conflict with the papacy escalated out of all proportion in February 1076 with the excommunication of Henry IV himself, Adam dedicated his great defence of his church to its head, Archbishop Liemar. It has only recently become clear that he did so as a devoted supporter of Liemar, the most faithful of the followers of King Henry IV, and the most astute opponent of Pope Gregory VII (Janson 1998: 31–256; Reuter 2002: xv; Scior 2002: 62–64; Blomkvist 2005: 572–73; Hartmann 2005: 112–15). After having presented his work to Liemar in 1076 he added marginal comments, the so-called *scholia*, until about 1080.

Adam's work became fundamental to the first Scandinavian history writing about the Viking Age during the twelfth century, and it has remained so until the present day. Especially influential has been his depiction of the cult at the temple of Uppsala (*Ubsola*), the 'house' that he calls *illa domus, quae caput est superstitionis barbaricae* ('the head of barbarian superstition') (Adam IV: 30). This temple, in Adam's representation, *totum ex auro paratum est* ('is totally made out of gold'),[3] and inside there were three statues of the three gods that were venerated by the people: Thor with a sceptre, flanked by an armed Wodan and Fricco, as mentioned, with a gigantic phallus (Adam IV: 26). Every ninth

[3] This claim was found unbelievable already by a copyist in the Middle Ages. In one late branch of manuscripts *paratum* was changed to *ornatum*, and many modern scholars have tended to follow this variant reading, 'totally covered with gold' instead of 'totally made out of gold', which however, as shown by all older manuscripts, has nothing to do with what Adam wrote (Janson 1998: 265–66 n. 935).

year (*post novem annos*) there was a feast common to all provinces of Sueonia. 'Kings and peoples, every single one', were then forced to transmit their gifts to Ubsola, and even the Christians had to redeem themselves from participation in these ceremonies. The picture given by Adam is full of striking details, for example, seventy-two as the number of sacrificed animal and human corpses in the grove beside the temple, a golden chain hanging over the roof of the house, and an eternally green tree — with no connection to the cult — whose nature 'no one knows' (Adam IV: 27 with scholia). Given all this detailed information it is rather strange that the topography of the place is so utterly misrepresented. According to Adam Uppsala was located on a flat plain surrounded by *montes* ('mountains' or rather 'alps'), making it reminiscent of a theatre, a description that fits Old Uppsala particularly badly, as it is situated on a small ridge stretching into the Uppsala plain, a part of the wide Uppland plain, with no mountains whatsoever in sight.[4]

On the basis of Adam's description Uppsala was long held to be the Iron Age core of the Swedish kingdom and the last stronghold of the pagan Germanic religion in Europe (e.g., Ljungberg 1938: 256, 260–62, 273; Dumézil 1939 and 1952: 24, 130–32; Nerman 1941, and many subsequent works; a late defence of this position can be found in Sundqvist 2002). In 1951, however, the many strange details and the lack of archaeological support caused the Swedish archaeologist Harald Wideen to suggest that Adam's Uppsala description might be a mainly literary construct, and the postholes at the site should, he suggested, rather be interpreted, regardless of Adam, as remains of an earlier wooden church, which would have been the normal thing to expect in similar places (Wideen 1951; cf. Olsen 1966; Nordahl 1996; Alkarp and Price 2005). In later years the literary strategies and strong political bias of Adam's text have been more generally recognized (Hallencreutz 1984; Janson 1998; Reuter 2002; Hartmann 2005: 112; Haki Antonsson 2014: 67), and this has also problematized the source value of its information on the 'pagan' religion of the North (Janson 1998; Scior 2002: 29–136; cf. Fraesdorff 2005: 251–317; Garipzanov 2011; Goetz 2013: I, 184).

[4] The famous Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth once told me that the very influential archaeologist Sune Lindqvist, when they were both professors in Uppsala in the mid-twentieth century, had tried to persuade him to agree that Adam's *montes* might possibly refer to the grave mounds in the vicinity, but Lönnroth had repeatedly answered 'It is impossible Sune, it is impossible!' ('Det går inte Sune, det går inte!'). Lönnroth was definitely right. Even if we assume that *montes* in Adam's view could refer to grave mounds, which it could not, the mounds in Old Uppsala would not anyway have encircled (*circumdant*) the temple making it look like a theatre.

On the basis of this new understanding of Adam's political position — as well as the new perspective on his general literary strategies, the new understanding of the concepts 'pagan' and 'idolatry', and the abundance of contemporary Christian rune stones in the area around Uppsala dating from the mid- and late eleventh century, and furthermore the presence of a competing Church organisation backed by the papacy and called *gallicana ecclesia* by Gregory VII — it has even been suggested that what Adam was aiming at with his Uppsala depiction was not a pagan 'house' at all but a Christian congregation, perhaps a centre for 'the gallican church' affiliated with the Lateran under Gregory VII, which did not accept the supremacy claims of Hamburg-Bremen and the Empire of Henry IV (Janson 1998 and 2010; Scior 2002: 58–64, 115–19; cf. Lindkvist 2006: 147 n. 50; Lassen 2009: 231; Perron 2009: 484; Kitzler Åhfeldt 2008: 10 and 2012: 89–90; Winroth 2012: 148; Wood 2012: 541). Even if not all scholars are ready to go so far, there is broad agreement today that Adam's representation is to a large extent a literary construct that must be read in the light of his own church's political situation (cf. Fuglesang 2004; Sundqvist 2011: 169; Sonne 2013: 139–71).

These results necessarily also have implications for how we understand what Adam says about the three gods, Thor, Wodan and Fricco. Previously it was often taken for granted that these names referred to the Old Norse deities Þórr, Óðinn and Freyr. Elias Wessén argues that the reason that Adam used the name Fricco was that he could not use the Scandinavian name Freyr/Frö because it coincided with the Old High German Frô — cf. Anglo-Saxon *frea*, 'lord' — then still meaning 'Lord' (Wessén 1924: 186; cf. Philippson 1929: 132; Green 1965: 30–38).[5] According to the new understanding of Adam's intentions, however, he might actually have referred to the name of Fricco, the demon of fornication from the Frankish tradition (Janson 1998: 268–69). That would mean that Adam inserted the name of the demon of fornication into his account of the temple at Uppsala without necessarily having made the identification between him and the Scandinavian designation Freyr.[6]

[5] In the seventh century, in one of the earliest remains of Christian West Germanic vocabulary, the Anglo-Saxon poet Cædmon spoke of *frea almihtig* ('God Almighty') (Marsden 2004: 81). Actually *freyr* could also mean 'lord' in Scandinavia (Fritzner 1886–96, s.v. *freyr*).

[6] The etymological connection between the names Fricco and Frô/Freyr might be obvious to modern historical linguists (Bugge 1904), but it was probably not at all clear to Adam. In the religious Anglo-Saxon language of the eighth and ninth centuries, which blew its spirit into the Frankish church under the Carolingians, the noun *frīg* referred to (carnal) love, sexual desire and sexual intercourse. This made the personification *Frīg* a suitable counterpart to the promis-

Something similar could be argued for Adam's use of the name Wodan, which is well attested in Frankish historiography. He places Wodan on the other side of Thor in the Uppsala temple. Adam was aware of the Scandinavian name Óðinn, as is evident from his explanation of the name of the Danish bishop Odinkar. According to Adam (scholium 25) this name meant *Deo carus* ('dear to God') (Adam: 97; cf. Janson 1998: 268). However, he derived the name Wodan from Old Saxon *wōd* ('fury': 'Wodan id est furor' (Adam IV: 26). To Adam, it seems, Wodan and Óðinn were two different entities, the first of which designated the demon of *ira* ('anger') and *furor* ('fury'), while the second referred to the Christian God, a circumstance that seems to indicate that he did not necessarily make the identification between Óðinn and Wodan when he inserted the demon of *furor* in his Uppsala description. In fact Óðinn/Odin is never identified with Wodan or even as a pagan god in Continental European sources, and arguments against identifying the two names as etymologically related have been proposed in recent scholarship (Shaw 2002: 35–42).

Only around the year 1000, probably under Danish influence, did the name Oðon become more widely known among leading Anglo-Saxon writers, and it was also at this point that the identification was made between the Old Norse Óðinn and the famous Woden from the long literary tradition via Bede and Paul the Deacon (see further discussion in Chapter 1.2 below). The first to make this connection was the Anglo-Saxon nobleman Æthelweard, who *c*. 985, with clear references to Bede and Paul the Deacon, described Vuothen as an ancient king over a multitude of barbarians. Æthelweard also says that the incredulous Northerners, the Dani, Northmanni and Sueui, were still oppressed by such seduction by the Devil that they worshipped him (i.e., Vuothen) as god (*ut deum*) (Æthelweard 9, 18).[7] It was only a few years later that the Benedictine monk and abbot Ælfric, a protégé of Æthelweard, and later of his son Æthelmær (Gretsch 2012), proclaimed that Mercury was once

cuous *Venus* in the name of the sixth day of the week (Whitbread 1941: 377–78; Fell 1985: 28; Klinck 1992: 163; Doyle White 2014: 295). The ambivalent sexual identity of this and other 'phantasms' (*scin-hiw*), as the Anglo-Saxon monk Ælfric called them around the year 1000, was quite natural to a medieval audience since the Devil himself was thought to change into these different shapes, 'sometimes in Jupiter's form, who is called Þor; sometimes in Mercury's who is called Oþon, sometimes in that of Venus, the foul goddess whom men call Fricg' (Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* II.264–65).

[7] It should be kept in mind that this is said in a work directed to none other than Abbess Mathilda of Essen, the granddaughter of Emperor Otto the Great and his English queen — with whom Æthelweard claimed membership of a common royal lineage from *Vouthen* — at a time when Otto's empire was trying to subject the Danes to its brand of Christianity.

honoured by all the heathens, and that he *oðon gehaten oðrum naman on denisc* ('is called Oðon by another name in Danish'). To this statement he later added that the bewildered Danes claimed that Jupiter 'whom they call Þor' was the son of Mercury, but Ælfric knew from written texts that Jupiter was the son of Saturn (Ælfric, *De falsis Deis* 684–85). However, the Danes who claimed Þórr to be the son of Mercury/Óðinn might not have been quite as confused as Ælfric assumed, because they probably did not mix these names with those of euhemerized classical mythology as he did. Ælfric's statement can therefore probably be taken as a contemporary witness to the fact that the Danes claimed the name Óðinn to designate the father and the name Þórr to designate the son. This, however, was not knowledge that troubled Adam of Bremen. As he did not identify Óðinn with Wodan, Thor could sit paternally in the centre of Uppsala with his sceptre, because his name, according to Adam, referred to Jupiter, and consequently he was the father of Wodan, whom Adam identified as Mars. To Adam these figures were all just representations of deadly sins and desires created through the seduction of demons, which becomes evident when he states that *Wodan [...] est furor* (Adam IV. 25).

Þórr is the only genuinely Scandinavian name that Adam used to depict the divine triad in the temple of Uppsala. This name was unknown to Frankish historiography but had begun to appear mainly in the same Anglo-Saxon sources as Oðon in the late tenth century. However, in the form Thur it was at that time also known on the other side of the Channel. It was mentioned in the history of the Normans written by Dudo, deacon of Saint Quentin around the year 1000. This is a very obscure passage, and therefore seldom cited fully, but it actualizes another aspect of Adam of Bremen's Uppsala picture: human sacrifices. Not many scholars today would read Adam's words on mass offerings of humans in Uppsala literally, but previously there were a few sources that were drawn upon as support for the idea that human sacrifices actually occurred in late Viking Age Scandinavia. Dudo is one of these. His work has sometimes been claimed as proof that the Danes had offered human sacrifices to Þórr. This, however, stems from a misunderstanding of the text. Dudo is not speaking here about the contemporary Danes but about the Goths in ancient times, and the sacrificed humans were the victims of their violent conquests.[8] It is true that he

[8] According to Dudo, these Goths, the famous destroyers of Rome, lived in a state of constant overpopulation due to their immoral life, and from time to time some of the young Goths were chosen by lot to emigrate. As a fulfilment of their ritual exodus they made sacrifices in honour of 'Thur, their God' (*Thur Deum suum*). Nothing was good enough for him but 'the blood of slaughtered humans' (*sanguinem mactabant hominum*). Dudo then, in what is a quite

goes on to discuss the emigration of the Danes from Troy through the Balkans, and in so doing implies that they were also associated with Thur. Dudo relied heavily on the classical tradition, including Jordanes, and he probably had very little actual knowledge about the North (Ziolkowski 1997: 569). What could perhaps be argued is that his association of Thur with both Goths and Danes might indicate that he saw a historical connection between these three entities. Dudo's narrative influenced William of Jumièges (*c.* 1070), who turned it into a story about the Northmen/Danes in the mid-ninth century, saying that these evil wolves set off to slaughter the sheep of God, *deo suo Thur humanum sanguinem libantes* ('pouring their god *Thur* an offering of human blood'). The passage serves as the beginning of a long account of the ferocious harrying of the Northmen in France during these years. These violent attacks on *christianitas* were evidently offerings of human blood to *Thur* according to William of Jumièges (William of Jumièges: I, 4–5).[9]

To attribute the practice of human sacrifice to any group of people is always a powerfully dehumanizing rhetorical figure. In this connection Adam of Bremen's description of Uppsala and the seventy-two corpses, hanging headless in the grove to rot, is likely to have been at least partially inspired by the description of the cult in Lejre in Denmark in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg from the second decade of the eleventh century (cf. Schmidt 1974: 381). Thietmar indicates the importance of the 'recalling' of the Danes by King Henry I after the victory over King Cnuba (*Cnuto*) in 934, and in doing so he also gave some details of the cult which the King then brought to an end. Every ninth year (*post VIIII annos*), 'after that point in time at which we celebrate Epiphany', that is, after 6 January, they all came together at 'the head (*caput*) of this kingdom', Lejre (*Lederun*) on Sjælland, and offered ninety humans,[10] along with just as many horses, dogs and cocks, the latter instead

different sequence of events than the offering to Thur, mentions a peculiar custom that they performed before setting off for hoped-for conquests. The young men — so the text seems to say - who had been chosen by lot to emigrate struck violently at the heads of a pair of oxen until the crushed brains lay spread out over the ground. A soothsaying priest then thoroughly examined the animals' aortas to predict the future, that is, in order to know where they should go. Thereafter, Dudo declares, they smeared their heads with the effused ox-blood, set their sails, if they did not go by horse, and sailed away 'keeping their murderous intentions for the slaughter of other peoples in their minds' (*tenebant intentionem in gentium mortiferam concussionem*), which was evidently what Dudo meant by human sacrifices to Thur (Lair 1865: 129–30).

[9] They are also said to have given a whole district to *Vulcanus*, i.e. they burned it down.

[10] When Thietmar went over the text a second time he made some adjustments to this pas-

of hawks, as a sacrifice to their gods (*diis*). The Danes were convinced, says Thietmar, that these offerings served them well in relation to these gods, that is, against the inhabitants of the underworld (*erga inferos*), as comfort for offences they had committed. 'Oh, how well our King did who prohibited them from such a detestable rite (*ritus*)!' Then, however, the noble Bishop of Merseburg says something that causes doubts about those to whom these sacrifices were actually aimed: 'Because a sacrifice to God the father is only acceptable from one that spares human blood. He teaches namely that you shall not murder the innocent and pious' (Thietmar I.17).

Since it was written several generations after the events it describes, Thietmar's Lejre description can be safely dismissed as a reliable source for huge human sacrifices in Denmark in the 930s, but new interpretative frameworks allow for interpretations to be contextualized in terms of the perspective of the author's contemporary society. Thus it has been argued that the noble Saxon bishop of Merseburg might actually have been trying to pursue readings of pagan cult that involved allegorical symbolism (Schmidt 1974).[11] It has also been suggested that what he actually referred to by mentioning human sacrifices was the victims of the illegal warfare of the 'pagans' (Janson 2009: 185).

Such extensive literary representations of the North were still possible in the eleventh century. When Adam of Bremen described Scandinavia around 1075, he could still write that beyond Denmark, 'begins another world, in Norway and Sweden, which are two extensive kingdoms in the north, that are almost unknown to our part of the world' (Adam IV.21). These words still carry a flavour of the Hyperborean myth, but a generation later the situation had changed rapidly. The Scandinavian world was now quickly and thoroughly being integrated into the culture of the Latin West. A few decades into the twelfth century, it was not 'another world' any more, and it was not solely a culture depicted from the outside. When it came to its history and its history writing, however, a strange thing now happened: namely, that the integration of

sage. For instance he changed 'ninety' to 'ninety and nine' sacrificed humans — to *LXXXX* he added *et VIIII* above the line.

[11] This includes number symbolism. In early and high medieval texts numbers are very seldom to be read as reflections of an objective truth. They usually function as symbols that illuminate the more spiritual sense of the text (Schmidt 1974: 387; Meyer and Suntrup 1987). In the case of the corpses in Adam of Bremen's Uppsala description, the number seventy-two may signal a reference to the seventy-two languages and peoples of the world to whom Christ sent out his seventy-two disciples (Luke 10.1; Meyer and Suntrup 1987: 760–64; Høiris 2005: 13–15). If so, this number may signify that what happened in Uppsala had a connection to the salvation of the world and the apocalypse (Janson 1998: 277).

Scandinavia into the world of Latin literacy, of Carolingian heritage, resulted in a perspective on the past that could not be freed from the depictions of the preceding Others. The vision of a monolithic pre-Christian religion that until the eleventh century confronted a just as monolithic Christendom came to govern people's perception for centuries. Only very recently has that picture slowly begun to change.

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1.2 – Anglo-Saxon Responses to Scandinavian Myth and Religion

Philip A. Shaw

The Germanic-speaking migrants who made their way to Britain around the fifth century AD were, as far as we can tell, pagans who no doubt brought with them their own deities, myths and religious practices. Of this religious life, only the most exiguous traces remain, and scholars (e.g., Chadwick 1899; Ryan 1963; Tripp 1983; North 1997) have been apt to bulk these traces out with reference to Scandinavian myth and religion as reflected in medieval Icelandic sources, such as the Poetic Edda, the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and some sagas. If they have been right to do so, then the history of Anglo-Saxon responses to Scandinavian myth and religion must be seen as one which begins not with our extant historical sources, but with the inheritance of something very like Scandinavian religious thought, belief and practice by those original Germanic-speaking migrants and their descendants. There are, to be sure, some cases in which persuasive similarities occur. The undoubtedly Anglo-Saxon ship burials at Sutton Hoo and at Snape are more widely paralleled in the Viking world than in Anglo-Saxon England, and we might be right in thinking that some community of religious belief underlies this shared funereal practice. At the same time, the picture of Scandinavian mythology that emerges from the Old Icelandic sources cannot safely be taken as a guide to what is missing in the evidence for Anglo-Saxon paganism. This is not the place, however, for a detailed elaboration of the arguments for and against the use of Scandinavian

Philip A. Shaw is Senior Lecturer in English Language and Old English at the University of Leicester. He has published on pre-Christian religious life, historical linguistics and narrative tradition.

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mythographic materials to fill in the yawning voids in our knowledge of the paganisms of Germanic-speaking peoples outside Scandinavia. We should simply note that our understanding of the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons responded to Scandinavian myth and religion may be complicated by considerations of the extent to which Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian pre-Christian myth coincided, or were thought by Christian Anglo-Saxons to coincide.

Given our scanty knowledge of Anglo-Saxon pagan myth and religion, it is difficult to assess the nature and scale of knowledge of Scandinavian myth and religion in Anglo-Saxon England. There are, however, a number of sources from Anglo-Saxon England that discuss or represent Scandinavian myth. Perhaps the most straightforward of these are the homiletic and hagiographical materials that include references to Scandinavian deities. The fullest discussions are those provided by the homilies *De falsis deis* ('On the False Gods') by Ælfric and Wulfstan (Ælfric, *De falsis Deis*: II, 676–712; Wulfstan, *Homilies*: 221–24). Ælfric's homily is based on Martin of Braga's *De correctione rusticorum* ('On the Correction of Rustics'), which discusses a number of deities using Roman names such as Jupiter, Mars and Mercury (Barlow 1950: 189; Barlow 1969: 74). Martin discusses these deities partly in order to discredit the use of their names in the names for the days of the week, and the success of his efforts and those of others holding the same view can be judged from the Portuguese names for the days of the week today, which consist of the Christian terms *sábado* (from Latin *sabbatum*, 'sabbath') and *domingo* (from Latin *dominica* [*dies*], 'the lord's day') for the weekend days and numbering from 'second' (*segunda feira*) to 'sixth' (*sexta feira*) for Monday to Friday (Meyer-Lübke 1901: 193). In order to discredit the supposedly pagan day-names, Martin discusses the deities whose names he believes the day-names contain. In so doing, he does not necessarily imply that these deities were being worshipped at the time he was writing, but rather he seeks to suggest that these deities were originally sinful human beings in Greece, who lived in the distant past, and whose names were taken on by demons, so that the worship of these gods constituted worshipping demons.

Ælfric, in contrast to Martin, evinces no particular disquiet at the Old English names for the days of the week, despite their apparently pagan content. Rather, he produces a vernacular version of Martin's discussion of the Graeco-Roman deities, but adds to this discussion a number of equations between these deities and Scandinavian deities. Jove he equates with Thor, Mercury with Odin and Venus with Frigg (Ælfric, *De falsis Deis*: II, 684, 686). Pope (Ælfric, *De falsis Deis*: II, 715–16) suggests that the homily shows that Ælfric was aware of a contemporary practice of making offerings to Odin on mountains (a view supported by Townend 2002: 133–35), but it seems quite possible

that this detail simply derives from Martin of Braga's reference to *excelsis montibus* ('high mountains') as sites of offerings (Shaw 2002: 137–38). It is, however, clear that Ælfric had some knowledge of the family relationships between the Scandinavian deities he mentions, as he notes the discrepancy between the Roman pantheon, in which Jove is the father of Mercury, and the Scandinavian equivalent, in which Thor (equivalent to Jove) is the son of Odin (equivalent to Mercury). This, he suggests, shows that Scandinavian pagans are in error as to the relationships between their deities. For Ælfric, then, the written tradition of classical learning presents a picture of the Roman deities that is not simply a model for understanding Scandinavian paganism but is, in fact, a statement of historical truth as to the origins of these deities as human beings. Since he accepts this view of the origins of pagan gods, he is compelled to regard Scandinavian pagans as confused about the relationships between the human beings who were later misinterpreted and adopted as deities.

Wulfstan's homily *De falsis Dies* ('The False Gods') is closely modelled on Ælfric's homily, and he therefore provides very much the same information, consisting mainly of equations between Jove and Thor and between Mercury and Odin. One might perhaps have expected Wulfstan to have a greater awareness of contemporary Danish paganism as a result of his episcopal duties in the north of England, but this homily gives no indication of such knowledge. Another text that can probably be attributed to Wulfstan's circle, an eschatological homily *De temporibus Anticristi* ('On the Times of Antichrist') (Napier 1883: 191–205), simply translates the names of the Roman deities Jove and Mercury in Adso's *De Antichristo* as Thor and Odin, without signalling what the names were in the original text (compare Napier 1883: 197 and Verhelst 1976: 27). This suggests that Ælfric and the author of *De temporibus Anticristi* were probably drawing on a well-established tradition of equations between Roman deities and their Anglo-Saxon equivalents, which is also evidenced in Latin-Old English glossaries such as the Corpus Glossary and in the Old English Martyrology (Hessels 1890: 70, 76, 78; Kotzor 1981: II, 172, 205, 422, 423; Rauer 2013: 154, 180). In drawing on this tradition, but using the Scandinavian rather than the Old English names for these deities, Ælfric and the author of *De temporibus Anticristi* signal an awareness of the Scandinavian deities but also imply an understanding of them as identical with native Anglo-Saxon deities. This may suggest that these authors had some awareness of the characteristics of the major Scandinavian deities, but this awareness could have been quite limited in scope, and it is clear that their main interest in the Scandinavian deities lies in their equivalence with Roman deities. This equivalence forms the basis for dismissing the Scandinavian deities as false gods, who

arose through the process of euhemerization of human beings (on euhemerism, see Chapter 2.1.1 below).

While Ælfric and Wulfstan give Thor's name in the form *þor*, the form *ður* occurs in the Cleopatra Glossary, in a gloss in which *Ioppiter* is glossed as *þunor, oððe ður* (Wright and Wülcker 1884: I, col. 425, l. 36). The double interpretation suggests that English and Scandinavian versions of the name appear here, and Townend (2002: 140) interprets the form *ður* as an East Norse form, in contrast to the West Norse-derived form *þor*, reflecting the impact of Norse speakers from different parts of Scandinavia on Anglo-Saxon England. A degree of caution, however, is necessary in extrapolating from this form to other apparently similar instances such as the reference to *Þures deofulgeldum* ('Þórr's idol') in the *Old English Martyrology* (Rauer 2013: 180; Kotzor 1981: II, 205). In this instance, loss of /n/ in the genitive case, causing *þunres* to become *þures*, represents a late West Saxon sound change that is not restricted to this name (Campbell 1959: 189–90). We cannot be certain, therefore, that genitive or dative forms of this name that lack <n> are not the Old English name, rather than the Old Norse one. In such circumstances, of course, we might reasonably suspect that individuals in late Anglo-Saxon England often did not distinguish between the English and Scandinavian gods, but rather tended to treat them as a single figure. Something similar seems to occur even where the English and Scandinavian names are readily distinguishable, as in the case of *Óðinn* and *Woden*. Conflation of these two figures seems to be clearly evidenced in the note 'oþon unde wodones dæg' ('Óðinn, from whom Wednesday [originates]'), which was added by the thirteenth-century Tremulous Hand of Worcester to the only surviving manuscript of Wulfstan's *De falsis Diis* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113, fol. 60^{v}; see Franzen 1998: fol. 60^{v} and p. 26; see Wulfstan, *Homilies*: 223). This later annotator clearly viewed these names as referring to one and the same figure, and it is not implausible to suppose that educated individuals in the late Anglo-Saxon period took a similar view. To what extent late Anglo-Saxon conceptions of figures such as Þórr/Þunor and Óðinn/Woden were influenced by Scandinavian and to what extent by Anglo-Saxon traditions is essentially invisible to us, but it seems reasonable to suppose that little knowledge of the native English figures survived into the Viking Age, and we might therefore argue that tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons' views of such figures were probably influenced most strongly by Scandinavian traditions.

While there is no evidence that the English traditions of the deities Þunor and Woden, whatever they may have been, were preserved into the Viking Age, Woden at least must have remained a familiar figure, whether or not he was identified as a deity. The extant Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies trace the

royal lines of most of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms back to this figure (Dumville 1976; Davis 1992). Many of the extant forms of the genealogies then trace the lines back beyond Woden, sometimes taking them back to biblical figures (Davis 1992: 29–31). In relation to the reception of Scandinavian mythology in Anglo-Saxon England, it is interesting to note that some Anglo-Saxon authors may have replaced the Old English form *Woden* in such genealogies with forms closer to Old Norse *Óðinn*, and certainly adjusted the names of his sons in order to echo the names of the sons of Óðinn. In order to make sense of these Scandinavianizing tendencies, however, we first need to understand something of the processes by which such genealogies formed in early Anglo-Saxon England.

The extant forms of the genealogies in which royal lines are traced back beyond Woden appear to represent the result of processes of accretion of material, whereby the genealogies were, over time, extended further backwards by the addition of earlier generations (Murray 1981: 104–05; Davis 1992: 28–31). The presence in the genealogies of Woden and his immediate descendants, moreover, appears to be the result of an early instance of such accretion. Our earliest evidence for an Anglo-Saxon royal genealogy appears in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, in which Bede lists the ancestors of the royal house of Kent. Interestingly, he does this in two separate sections. In Book I of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, he describes the ancestry of Hengest and Horsa, giving their forebears as follows (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 50):

Uoden
↓
Uecta
↓
Uitta
↓
Uihtgisl

This list of ancestors seems justified by the central importance of Hengest and Horsa, whom Bede presents as founding figures for the kingdom of Kent and, more broadly, as the originaries of the Anglo-Saxon people. In Book II, discussing King Æthelberht of Kent, Bede then traces this monarch back to a figure called Oisc, whose name gives the term *Oiscingas* ('sons of Oisc') for the kings of Kent (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: 150). This figure Oisc, Bede claims, is the son of Hengest. This may well represent an early stage of accretion of earlier generations, by which the kings of Kent received a new series of ancestors prior to an earlier founding figure called Oisc (cf. Sims-Williams 1983: 22–23). This

suggests, then, that Woden and his immediate descendants were added to the Kentish royal genealogy by Bede or at least around the time of Bede or shortly before. This impression is also consonant with the fact that Woden's son in this genealogy is called *Uecta*, a name which seems to derive from the Latin name for the Isle of Wight (Sims-Williams 1983: 25; Shaw 2002: 100). Woden and his sons, then, may well represent an addition to the royal genealogies that developed in early Anglo-Saxon England, perhaps around the seventh or early eighth centuries. In the course of the Viking Age, however, Woden and his sons became a focus for comparison with Scandinavian myth.

The most obvious case of Scandinavianization of Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies occurs in Æthelweard's *Chronicon*, a late tenth-century translation into Latin of a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In his translation, the West Saxon nobleman Æthelweard (who was very probably the same Æthelweard who was Ælfric's patron) replaces the Old English form *Bældæg* (see, for instance, Bately 1986: 22, 25, 45 [s.a. 547, 552, 597, 855]) with the form *Balder*, which is clearly a rendering of Old Norse *Baldr* (Townend 2002: 125). The Old English form *Witta*, moreover, is replaced with *Wither* and *Vuithar*, apparently rendering the Old Norse *Víðarr*, the name of another of Óðinn's sons. Townend (2002: 124) points out that Æthelweard has transposed the order of the individuals named *Wecta* and *Witta* so that his *Wither* (for *Witta*) is the son of Woden rather than the grandson. In doing so, Townend (2002: 124) argues, Æthelweard adjusts the pre-existing Anglo-Saxon genealogical tradition in order to match with contemporary Scandinavian myths. Meaney has also suggested that Æthelweard's rendering of the name *Woden* with the form *Vuothen* represents a 'compromise form' between the Old English name and the Old Norse *Óðinn* (Meaney 1966: 110), a suggestion that is accepted by Townend (2002: 122).

The notion that Æthelweard's form *Vuothen* represents a linguistically hybrid form, in which the Old Norse *Óðinn* has influenced the central consonant of the Old English *Woden*, bears further scrutiny. Townend (2002: 122 n. 57) notes a similar form *woðen* in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.xiv, which is a manuscript of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* dating from around the middle of the eighth century. While Townend sees this as simply another 'compromise form', it may actually raise questions about the idea that *Vuothen* need be such a form. In Bede's orthographic practice, as far as we are able to judge it on the basis of the earliest manuscripts of the *Ecclesiastical History*, <d> was used to represent the dental fricative later represented by <þ> and <ð>, as well as to represent Old English /d/ (Blair and Mynors 1959: 20). It is possible, therefore, that a later copyist reading <woden> could have interpreted

the medial <d> as representing the dental fricative, and therefore replaced it with <ð>. Of course, if we assume that the name *Woden* was well known to all Anglo-Saxons in the eighth century, then it would be very strange for a copyist to have made such a substitution, as they would very probably have recognized the name and known that the medial consonant was /d/. However, it is important to note that this interpretation rests entirely on an assumption; we have no way of knowing how well known or otherwise Woden was in eighth-century England. It is quite possible that the genealogical tradition in which Woden features so prominently owes its popularity to the impact of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. If so, the possibility arises that Bede actually referred to a god (and ancestral figure) called *Woðen*. The copyist of Cotton Tiberius A.xiv was probably working in Northumbria within a generation of Bede (Colgrave and Mynors 1969: xlvi), so could have been aware that the sequence <woden> in the exemplar represented a name *Woðen* rather than *Woden*. If this name were not particularly well known, other copyists might have copied it exactly as they found it, thus perpetuating the form *Woden*, which would have been interpreted by later readers and copyists as a form containing /d/ rather than the dental fricative. This could perhaps have led to a situation in which there were two variant pronunciations of the name, [wo:ðen] and [wo:den], the former of which was a good deal rarer but nevertheless known to Æthelweard, who would quite naturally have rendered it as *Vuothen* in a Latin text. The existence of a variant *Woðen* might also help to explain the form *Owðen* in one of the two manuscripts of *De temporibus Anticristi* (Napier 1883: 197). Townend (2002: 142 n. 74) characterizes this form as 'curious and hard to explain'. One possibility would be that it represents a misreading of a compromise form *Woðen*, but it could also be satisfactorily explained if there were a minor variant form *Woðen* for the name of the god Woden. There is, then, no necessity for us to posit any efforts on the part of Anglo-Saxon authors to produce compromise forms mingling elements of the names *Woden* and *Óðinn*. While such efforts are clearly a possibility, the tendency in late Anglo-Saxon England to treat Woden and Óðinn as one and the same figure suggests that authors who were interested in making reference to the Scandinavian figure while also referencing the English figure could simply use the Scandinavian name. We cannot discount entirely the possibility of compromise forms, but it is not clear that Anglo-Saxon authors would have felt any compelling need for such forms, and the forms that have been explained in these terms can be explained as variant forms of the English name *Woden*.

Whether we understand Æthelweard's *Vuothen* as a Scandinavianized form or not, the cases of *Bældæg* becoming *Balder* and *Witta* becoming *Wither*/

Vuithar seem very clear-cut instances of the replacement of the native English names by names drawn from Scandinavian myth. That Æthelweard was aware of such mythology is not surprising; Ælfric, with whom he had close connections, was also aware of it, suggesting that the circles within which these two men moved knew some basic details of Scandinavian myth. Since Æthelweard probably composed his *Chronicon* a good while before Ælfric composed his *De falsis deis*, of course, it is not impossible that Ælfric derived some of his knowledge of Scandinavian myth from Æthelweard himself (on the dating of the *Chronicon*, see Whitbread 1959: 584–85). In any event, Townend (2002: 135) rightly notes that these two authors display rather different attitudes to this material, with Ælfric attempting to fit the Scandinavian gods into a family tree inherited via Christian learning from Graeco-Roman myth, whereas Æthelweard reworks the Kentish royal genealogy in order to fit the father-son relationship between Óðinn and Víðarr found in Scandinavian myth. These varying approaches, Townend suggests, 'are indicative of the differences between the book-based orthodoxy of a churchman and the somewhat haphazard inquisitiveness of a layman' (2002: 135). It is important to consider, however, the circumstances in which a tenth-century West Saxon nobleman might rework Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies in the light of Scandinavian myth. The decision to do so perhaps reflects a tendency to value Scandinavian mythological narrative among the upper echelons of Anglo-Saxon lay society in the second half of the tenth century, perhaps as a way of creating a sense of shared heritage, and thus increased social cohesion, with those of Scandinavian origin among the English populace, or perhaps as a way of generating political capital in this Anglo-Scandinavian context (cf. Frank 1981: 128–29; Murray 1981: 105). In order to engage with Scandinavian myth in this way, of course, the Christian Anglo-Saxons who did so must have felt able to integrate it within the broader Christian worldview. The euhemeristic treatment of Scandinavian deities by churchmen such as Ælfric and Wulfstan, in fact, provides an orthodox Christian framework within which the genealogical traditions can readily be accommodated. There are indeed differences in the emphases of Ælfric's and Æthelweard's treatments of Scandinavian mythological figures, but they are treatments that are both compatible with an understanding of these figures as human beings of the distant past, mistakenly identified as gods.

It is also possible that the euhemeristic tradition informs some less obvious responses to Scandinavian deities in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. There is a long history to the idea that Herebeald and Hæðcyn, the brothers of Hygelac in *Beowulf*, represent veiled versions of the Scandinavian gods Baldr and Hǫðr (for a useful summary of the debate around this issue, see Fulk *et*

al. 2008: xlvii–xlviii). In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, Hǫðr is depicted as a blind god who is misled by Loki into killing his brother Baldr with a piece of mistletoe used as some sort of missile (*SnE* 2005: 45–46). In *Beowulf*, Hæðcyn (the first element of whose name recalls the name Hǫðr) accidentally shoots Herebeald (the second element of whose name recalls the name Baldr) with a bow (Fulk *et al*. 2008: 83–84, ll. 2435–67). The narratives are similar in that they both involve one brother accidentally killing the other brother with a missile, they both dwell on the grief that this causes their father (Odin in the *Edda*, Hreðel in *Beowulf*), and the names of the brothers are similar in both narratives. The setting of this narrative, however, is very different, with the deities in the *Edda* corresponding to clearly human individuals in *Beowulf*. This is, of course, entirely consonant with the responses to Scandinavian deities explored above, but it is also interesting to note that the Baldr/Hǫðr narrative is clearly reformulated in a human setting in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, where the two divine brothers become instead two warring kings (*Saxo* 2015: i, iii. 2.1–3.7, pp. 144–61). The identification of the Herebeald/Hæðcyn narrative in *Beowulf* as a reflex of the Baldr myth is not universally accepted (see, for instance, Turville-Petre 1964: 121). It is probably fair to say that the narrative details could be similar through pure coincidence or because they reflect a widespread narrative motif. The similarity in the names, however, is highly suggestive of a more direct link between the Baldr myth and the Herebeald/Hæðcyn narrative.

A similar interpretation has been invoked for the passing reference in *Beowulf* to the *Brosinga mene* ('necklace of the Brosingas'), which was carried away by a figure called Hama (Fulk *et al*. 2008: 42, ll. 1198–9). As Dronke (1966–69: 323–34) notes, the Old English phrase *Brosinga mene* strongly recalls the Old Norse *Brísinga men* ('necklace of the Brísingar'), which refers to a necklace owned by the goddess Freyja that appears in *Þrymskviða*, stanzas 13, 15 and 19 (*NK* 113) and which is in all probability the same necklace that features in *Sǫrla þáttr* as a possession of Freyja (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–88: i, 275–76). This necklace is, moreover, the subject of a contest between Loki and Heimdallr mentioned by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 1998: i, 19), and the first element of the latter's name is, in Dronke's view (1966–69: 323–34), cognate with the root of the name *Hama*. The similarity between *Hama* and *Heimdallr* is, however, almost certainly coincidental. Hama is mentioned in *Beowulf* in connection with the Gothic ruler Eormenric, strongly suggesting that he is an Anglo-Saxon reflex of the figure Heime, who appears in relation to Ermanaric (Old English *Eormenric*) in Middle High German sources and in the form *Heimir* in the Old Norse *Þiðreks saga* (for a useful summary of the tex-

tual references to this figure, see Fulk *et al*. 2008: 193–94). Quite how and why the *Brosinga mene* moved between heroic tradition and the sphere of the gods is unclear (although here the similarity between the names *Heimir* and *Heimdallr* could have played a role), but there seems little reason to suppose that the *Beowulf*-poet was aware of a connection of the necklace with Freyja; the brief allusion in *Beowulf* seems to reflect the heroic narrative tradition rather than any myth surrounding the *Brosinga mene*. While Dronke (1966–69) interprets this alongside the Herebeald/Hæðcyn narrative and Beowulf's dragon-fight as evidence that the Anglo-Saxon poet repeatedly engaged in reworking myths shared between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon paganism, it is a great deal more likely that in this case the poet is simply drawing upon a shared body of narratives to do with human heroes.

If we accept the idea that the Herebeald/Hæðcyn narrative in *Beowulf* is directly linked to Scandinavian mythological narrative, however, it remains unclear what the implications of this link are for our understanding of the reception of Scandinavian myth in England. The narrative of *Beowulf* takes place largely in Scandinavia, and the Herebeald/Hæðcyn narrative relates to a Scandinavian royal line. The *Beowulf*-poet could have received some or all of the narrative material for the poem from Scandinavia, and one might therefore suggest that this narrative represents a Scandinavian reworking of the Baldr myth that was drawn on by the Anglo-Saxon poet. However, it is not entirely clear that the narrative materials for *Beowulf* all came directly from Scandinavia; it is also possible that they reached Anglo-Saxon England by an indirect route, perhaps via the Continent, or that some of them developed in England. The Herebeald/Hæðcyn episode is essentially self contained, explaining how Hygelac came to assume the Geatish throne when his brothers died. It seems possible, then, that these two brothers represent an insertion into the Geatish royal genealogy, and it is therefore difficult to decide when, where and how their narrative came to feature in the broader narrative of the Geatish royal house. Wherever one stands on the dating of *Beowulf*, then, this episode could be the product of Viking Age interactions between England and Scandinavia, but this is only one possibility among several.

Leaving aside these problems of the origin of this narrative, it is also questionable whether the Anglo-Saxon audiences of *Beowulf*—or, indeed, its Anglo-Saxon author—would have been aware that it was related (however closely or distantly) to Scandinavian myth. There is no evidence for an Anglo-Saxon god cognate with the Scandinavian Baldr, although the reference in *The Dream of the Rood* to all of creation weeping has sometimes been thought to reflect an Anglo-Saxon version of the Baldr myth (Stephens 1866: 29–30; but also much

more recently O'Donoghue 2007: 94), a view which Stanley (2000: 78–79) quite rightly rejects. As Stanley notes, this parallel is likely to reflect the shared Christian traditions of Snorri Sturluson and the author of *The Dream of the Rood*, rather than the existence of an Anglo-Saxon equivalent of Baldr. The place of Baldr in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies is filled by a figure called Bældæg (Dumville 1976: 30–37). This name is not linguistically cognate with Old Norse *Baldr*; the direct cognate for this Old Norse name in Old English is the rare noun *bealdor*. The noun *bealdor* is attested only ten times in the extant corpus of Old English, always in poetry, and, as the *Dictionary of Old English* points out, it is employed only in phrases where it follows a genitive plural determinant (*DOE*: s.v. *bealdor*). The determinant is often a term denoting warriors (*wiga*, *guma*, *rinc* and *beorn* are all attested), and we might perhaps see the other determinants (*wine*, 'friend'; *sinc*, 'treasure'; *þeod*, 'people'; and *mægð*, 'family, race') as constituting imaginative extensions from the idea of warriors as the natural followers of a lord (*DOE*: s.v. *bealdor*). This suggests that *bealdor* was an archaic word in Old English, preserved only in a poetic formula. If there ever was an Anglo-Saxon god called *Bealdor*, there is no trace of him, and the existence of the poetic formula suggests that the word *bealdor* was employed at a very early stage in the Anglo-Saxon period as a term meaning 'lord'. There is little reason, then, to think that the pagan Anglo-Saxons had a god who was cognate with Baldr (cf. Turville-Petre 1964: 121–22). The correspondences between the narratives of Herebeald and Hæðcyn in *Beowulf* and Baldr and Hǫðr in the *Prose Edda* are, then, interesting as a problem in the development of the narrative of *Beowulf* and its potential relationship to narrative materials originating in Scandinavia. That the narrative in *Beowulf* represents deliberate commentary by an Anglo-Saxon author on Scandinavian myth, however, seems unlikely (*pace* Frank 1981: 132).

While gods and goddesses provide much of the evidence for Anglo-Saxon reception of, and responses to, Scandinavian myth, we should not overlook valkyries, as they present an interesting problem in assessing the extent of knowledge of Scandinavian myth in Anglo-Saxon England. Jesch (2004: 66) sees a connection between Wulfstan's uses of the Old English word *wælcyrie* and knowledge of Scandinavian conceptions of the valkyrie. This is certainly a possibility, but there is also good reason to consider the possibility that Wulfstan was simply drawing on a native English tradition that was broadly similar to the Scandinavian tradition. The word *wælcyrie* does not reflect borrowing of the Old Norse term *valkyrja*; Hofmann (1955: 190) discounts this possibility on the grounds that Old English *wælcyrie* is attested as early as the eighth century AD, in the *Corpus Glossary*, suggesting that it is a native word

(Bischoff *et al*. 1988: fol. 60^{v}; see also *OED*: s.v. *walkyrie*, accessed February 2015). Wulfstan lists *wælcyrian* alongside human wrongdoers such as *wiccan* ('wizards, witches'), *myltestran* ('prostitutes') and *reaferas* ('robbers'), suggesting that perhaps he understood *wælcyrian* as human rather than supernatural figures (Wulfstan, *Homilies*: 265).

At first glance, on one hand this might appear at odds with the supernatural qualities of Scandinavian valkyries, suggesting that Wulfstan was unaware of the Scandinavian tradition; on the other hand, the Anglo-Saxon glossarial tradition gives some indication that the Anglo-Saxons might also have understood *wælcyrian* as supernatural, as it uses this term to gloss the Furies of Graeco-Roman mythology, both under their collective name *Erinyes* and under their individual names *Tisiphone* and *Allecto* (Hessels 1890: 115; Wright and Wülcker 1884: I, col. 347, l. 32). Other figures glossed using this term are the Roman goddess of war, Bellona (Wright and Wülcker 1884: I, col. 360, l. 3) and, more surprisingly, the goddess Venus (Napier 1900: 115). The general trend here is clear; classical figures who are in some way defined by their fearsome or warlike qualities are identified with the term *wælcyrie*. It is harder, however, to account for this gloss's application to Venus. In this instance, *wælcyrie* is a second gloss, following an initial gloss *gydene* ('goddess'). It is not entirely clear whether we should understand this as a simple alternative or as an attempt to specify further the type of goddess involved, but the latter seems less likely in view of Venus's lack of martial or fearsome qualities. In general, the glossaries suggest that *wælcyrie* was used for fearsome or warlike women, and perhaps particularly for supernatural women. If we accept that the Old English word was not a borrowing from Old Norse, then it is difficult to interpret the glossarial evidence other than as indicating the existence of a native English tradition of supernatural female figures called *wælcyrian*.

Why, then, does Wulfstan apparently not recognize the supernatural aspect of the *wælcyrie* that is evidenced in the glossarial tradition? One possibility is that the native English tradition of female supernatural figures called *wælcyrian* had died out, and the word had come to be used as a term for human women who performed magic. In this case, the Scandinavian valkyrie tradition may have had no influence on Wulfstan at all. Another possible answer may lie in the tradition of euhemeristic interpretation of pagan gods and goddesses that Wulfstan draws on in his *De falsis Deis* (discussed above), and which seems to be central to all of the Anglo-Saxon responses to Scandinavian deities we have discussed above. If the supernatural figures of pagan myth are to be interpreted as historical, human figures who were later misunderstood as supernatural figures, then Wulfstan's treatment of the *wælcyrie* as human might derive from his

sense that some contemporary human beings were behaving in ways similar to those ancient human beings who underwent the process of euhemerization. Whether this sense drew on his knowledge of a native English valkyrie tradition, a Scandinavian one, the classical tradition of figures such as the Furies, or some combination of these traditions is hard to determine. Given that our evidence for the English tradition rests on the use of the term *wælcyrie* in translating Latin names and on Wulfstan's own use of it, the potential for circular reasoning is clear. In any case, while influence from the Scandinavian valkyrie tradition cannot be ruled out, it seems equally possible that Wulfstan knew nothing of the Scandinavian tradition, and that his work simply reflects a development of the English tradition, either through a shift in the precise meaning of the term *wælcyrie* or through Wulfstan's own euhemeristic reinterpretation of this term.

Our understanding of the reception and use of Scandinavian myth in Anglo-Saxon England is complicated by a number of factors. In some cases, it is difficult to establish whether particular forms of names refer to Scandinavian deities or to their Old English cognates, and our very limited knowledge of Anglo-Saxon paganism makes it very hard to know what similarities and differences between native and Scandinavian myth might have affected Anglo-Saxon responses to the latter. At the same time, our evidence is inevitably skewed towards those of higher social status, so that the evidence presented above for knowledge and use of Scandinavian myth among the Anglo-Saxons reveals much about the preoccupations of aristocrats and churchmen, but almost nothing about the lived experience of ordinary Anglo-Saxons, both in and out of the Danelaw. The difference in approach between ecclesiastical and lay authors, however, is suggestive. While the Church seems to have understood Scandinavian myth largely through the prism of the classical tradition that formed part of the cultural heritage of early medieval Christianity, the evidence of texts like Æthelweard's *Chronicon* and *Beowulf* may indicate a less self-consciously intellectual response to Scandinavian myth that focuses instead on understanding it as part of a shared cultural tradition (although still within the confines of Christian euhemeristic thinking), linking at least some of the Scandinavians who settled in England with their English neighbours. Whether such mythological interconnections formed part of day-to-day intercourse between those of Scandinavian and those of English descent in the broader population is hard to say, but it is tempting to suppose that they did.

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1.3 – Finno-Ugric Neighbours

Thomas A. DuBois

It is fruitful to recognize the conceptual linkages between the idea of reception and the wider, more multidirectional process of 'interpenetration'. Over the course of millennia of close geographic, economic and cultural engagement, speakers of Germanic and Finno-Ugric languages in the Nordic region observed, shared and adapted each others' traditions, both religious and otherwise. Such exchange was a natural and expectable product of close and continuous contacts, ones which included intermarriage and occasional assimilation of one population into another. Disentangling such strands of mutual influence in order to arrive at some notion of an original, pre-contact religious tradition for any of the Nordic peoples is difficult, if not impossible, particularly since our data for any posited pre-contact era is scanty and remote, given the lack of written texts bearing on the subject. Archaeology allows us to trace the processes of intercultural contacts over time and can on occasion help to reveal prior religious traditions or ideas that were eventually supplanted by new ideas borrowed from or influenced by neighbouring peoples. Comparative data can help us posit pre-contact forms — for example, by looking at common Indo-European features of mythology as compared to what we find in the medieval Scandinavian sources, or by looking at North Eurasian and Uralic mythologies as counterparts to the traditions of the Finns and Sámi.

In the twentieth century, scholars have increasingly looked at variations *within* the Nordic cultures as indicators of possible vectors of influence: for

Thomas A. DuBois is Professor of Scandinavian Studies and Folklore Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Among his book publications are *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (1999) and the edited volume *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia* (2008).

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example, by comparing Sámi traditions from areas of extensive Scandinavian contacts (like central and southern Sweden) with those attested for more remote regions (like northern Finland and the Kola Peninsula), it becomes possible to see how Scandinavian influences may have affected south Sámi traditions (Rydving 1992). Similarly, scholars in the area of Scandinavian pre-Christian religion have paid increasingly greater attention to the regional differences within the Norse world: differentiating, say, the traditions recorded in Iceland or located in Norwegian Hålogaland from those of southern Denmark or eastern Sweden. This increased sensitivity to regional variation allows for the possible reconstruction of local religious traditions with an eye to their reliance on, or influence from, the other cultures with which they had close contact. It becomes possible to recognize Celtic influences in western Norway or Iceland, Sámi influences in Hålogaland and Finnmark, continental influences in Denmark, and so on.

The earliest textual record we have of a Balto-Finnic religious tradition already shows extensive exchange with adjacent religions. A thirteenth-century birch-bark text written in the Cyrillic alphabet and preserved by chance in the ruins of medieval Novgorod contains a prayer or incantation addressed to Jumolanuoli ('Arrow of god'), but it also names the deity as Bou, apparently a borrowing of the Christian Russian term for the omnipotent deity *Bog* (DuBois 1999: 106; Holthoer 1981: 161).

Ample evidence points to the idea that Sámi and Finns also became aware of the Scandinavians' religious traditions and assimilated elements into their own practices. Sámi burial customs, for instance, change over during the Viking Age to include the deposition of metal grave goods, apparently in imitation of Scandinavian practice (Zachrisson 1987). As Håkon Rydving has shown (Rydving 1992), Sámi in the south Sámi area seem to have recognized similarities between the Sámi thunder god Dierpmis and the Norse god Þórr, altering the name of the Sámi god over time to Hovrengaellies ('Thunder man') in a way that reflects their awareness of concepts central to the Norse understanding of the nature of the god Þórr. The south Sámi term for thunder, *hovren*, derives directly from the Scandinavian theonym Þórr. Although early twentieth-century scholars tended to see such nomenclature shifts as evidence for cultural borrowing, more recent scholarship suggests more that the Sámi were showing their awareness of cultural parallels, making the terminological shift in a sense a very concrete instance of Sámi 'reception' of Old Norse materials.

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1.4 – Celtic-Scandinavian Contacts

Bernhard Maier

In writing about medieval 'Celtic' perceptions of the pre-Christian Scandinavian religion and medieval Scandinavian perceptions of the pre-Christian 'Celtic' religion, we first need to clarify the meaning of the term 'Celtic'. In what follows, the term is used neither in the sense in which it was understood by classical historians and ethnographers (for whom it was restricted to Continental Europe) nor in that which is prevalent in modern scholarship (where it is clearly defined and widely used in linguistics and philology, but hotly disputed and controversial in both history and archaeology). Following common parlance, this chapter uses 'Celtic' as a convenient umbrella term referring either to speakers of a Celtic language (that is, for the medieval and modern periods, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Manx), or to the pre-Christian religions of the regions in which these languages were or are spoken, as far as these religions may be inferred from philological and archaeological sources. To indicate the chronological scope of the discussion, the term 'medieval' is used both to mark off the time span to be treated here from the modern period, and to avoid the suggestion of a clear demarcation line between the pre-Christian and the Christian periods.

With regard to chronology, contacts between the Scandinavians and the Celtic-speaking peoples of the British Isles and Ireland may well have predated the Viking Age, but the purely archaeological evidence for such contacts is disputed (Barrett 2003: 78–80) and sheds no light on the mutual perception of religious customs and ideas. For the purpose of the present chapter, therefore, 'Celtic' perceptions of pre-Christian Scandinavian religions and medieval

Bernhard Maier is Professor of Religious Studies and the European History of Religions at the University of Tübingen. His main interest is in the religious history of the Celtic- and Germanic-speaking peoples.

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Scandinavian perceptions of pre-Christian 'Celtic' religions may be assumed to have begun around 800 in the wake of Viking activities affecting the Celtic-speaking populations of Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the Isle of Man. Such perceptions may be taken to have ended by 1200, when all the regions involved had become Christian, although in some cases they may well be reflected in later literary texts. Between 800 and 1100, the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia were at least to some people in some regions a living force, capable of being observed in their day-to-day functioning, whereas the pre-Christian religions of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man must at all times and for everybody have been a thing of the past. Thus speakers of a Celtic language may occasionally have encountered genuine Scandinavian paganism, albeit only through the lens of their own Christian faith, whereas both pagan and Christian Scandinavians would never have come into contact with 'Celtic' paganism, except as a distant memory transmitted through Christian channels or as a residue transformed by and lingering on the margins of an essentially Christian society.

Before we attempt to gauge the impact which Celtic-Scandinavian relations may have had on the perceptions of the respective religious conditions, it is useful to consider these relations as such, trying to establish the framework within which perceptions of religious ideas may be assumed to have worked (for recent surveys of the evidence, see Redknap 2000; Dumville 2002; Barrett 2003; Mytum 2003; and the contributions in Brink and Price 2008: 341–438). Here it must be noted at the outset that distinguishing 'Celts' and Scandinavians implies a blatantly modern approach which may not do full justice to the problem of ethnicity, which relates to a complex set of questions involving biological descent, material culture and self-identity (cf., e.g., Barrett 2003: 91–99; Mytum 2003: 114–16). What also needs to be stressed is that our knowledge of the day-to-day reality of contacts between the Norse, the Irish, the Scottish and the Welsh is extremely limited due to the paucity of written evidence and the wide variety of interpretations suggested by the often meagre material remains. Thus it has been claimed that the 'complete absence of contemporary written evidence for the Scandinavian take-over of the Northern Isles and the near-complete absence for the Western Isles has allowed arguments to be mounted from highly uncertain interpretations of archaeological evidence' (Dumville 2002: 222). The question to what extent much later Old Norse narratives preserve genuine traditions dating from the period with which they deal is often impossible to answer. It has been suggested, however, that that they 'are at best distorted and at worst mythology' (Barrett 2003: 75).

In many cases, contacts between Vikings and the native Celtic-speaking population may have been fleeting and transitory, producing neither an oppor-

tunity nor the desire to gather information on religious topics: 'Hit-and-run operations were easiest' (Dumville 2002: 223), and they may well have been the most frequent type of encounter. Unsurprisingly, one of the Old Irish triads lists 'the Viking in his hauberk' (*gall ina lúirig*) as one of three types of persons with whom conversation is difficult (Almqvist 1996: 144). In general, interreligious encounters would seem to have been most likely to occur in such permanent and extensive Viking settlements as Dublin, Limerick and Waterford, which would have furnished the best opportunities for prolonged contacts involving both the 'presence of Viking entrepreneurs at Irish trading-posts' and the 'payment of tribute as "protection money" and the ransoming of captives' (Downham 2014: 20). More especially, the taking and exchange of slaves (Holm 1986; Brink 2008; Wyatt 2009 and 2014) would have furnished opportunities for the observation, interpretation and transmission of foreign cultural items, including religious ideas. The possibility as such is illustrated by the literary figure of the Irish slave Melkorka, who is carried off in a Viking raid and later becomes the mother of the Icelandic *goði* Óláfr Hǫskuldsson, teaching her son Irish and telling him about his Irish relatives (*ÍF* v: 27–28). This may be compared with the amorous reference to an Irish girl (Old Norse *ingjan* being considered as a transcript of Old Irish *ingen*) in a skaldic verse attributed to Magnús berfœttr 'Barelegs' Óláfsson (Mberf Lv 6/6, *SkP* II.1.390; Almqvist 1996: 163). As contemporary evidence, one might adduce the drawing of a bearded captive being led off to a ship by a warrior, which was found on the island of Inchmarnock at the northern end of the Sound of Bute and is dated to the late eighth or early ninth century (Lowe 2007). While it is difficult to know how many Vikings would have come to understand the Celtic language of the natives (and vice versa), there is some evidence for bilingualism to be gleaned from narrative sources (Almqvist 1996: 148–51, 163–65; Ó Corráin 2009). Apart from long-term residences in a foreign environment, festivities attending the conclusion of treaties, trading contracts and military alliances between Celtic-speaking natives and Vikings would also have provided ample opportunities for the exchange of stories and traditions, although there does not seem to be any specific evidence for the transmission of religious knowledge on such occasions.

In the Irish annals, the Vikings are first called 'heathens' (Latin *gentiles*, Old Irish *genti*), and from 827 onwards, also 'foreigners' (Old Irish *gaill*). It has been suggested that the transition from *genti* ('heathens') to the later standard designation *gaill* ('foreigners') may represent 'a modification of the unqualifiedly hostile connotations of "pagan"' (Etchingham 2014: 32). It is, however, to be noted that contemporary Frankish sources on Viking raids use not only terms like *pagani* or *gentiles*, but also (and sometimes more frequently) designa-

tions like *Nortmanni*, *Dani* and *pyratae*. In fact, it may be questioned whether the Frankish (and Irish) use of 'pagans' as a designation of the Vikings is intended to stress the paganism of the invaders, or whether it is not rather due to the explicitly Christian outlook of the monastic observers, for whom *pagani* ('pagans') would be simply synonymous with *barbari* ('barbarians, foreigners') (Coupland 1991). The suggestion 'that a self-conscious paganism developed in opposition to the Christianity of the native ruling classes' and that we may 'recognize the development or intensification of some spirit of patriotism — perhaps fuelled too by religion — on the part of peoples attacked' (Dumville 2002: 225–26), is difficult to prove. From 851 onwards, Irish sources make a distinction between *Finngenti/Finngaill* and *Dubgenti/Dubgaill*, which seem to designate earlier and later arrivals respectively, although the etymology or motivation of these designations remains obscure. Likewise, the term *Gall-Goídil*, first attested in the *Annals of Ulster* for 856, remains uncertain: 'In what sense they were a mix of Gaelic and Scandinavian, whether ethnic, cultural or simply a military alliance, is obscure' (Etchingham 2014: 27; cf. Clancy 2008). Pre-Christian religious rituals of Irish Vikings, which in principle could have been observed and commented upon by Celtic-speaking outsiders, would have included both funerary ceremonies to be inferred from burials furnished with grave-goods (Barrett 2003: 80–82) and ritual depositions of weapons in rivers, at crossings and in lakes and bogs (Lund 2014). However, no actual descriptions of such rituals from Celtic-speaking observers, either in Latin or in the vernacular, have come down to us.

Turning to the question in which ways the pagan Norsemen may have perceived the pre-Christian religion of the Celtic-speaking population, we encounter a twofold uncertainty: on the one hand, our knowledge of Irish and British paganism is extremely meagre, due to the paucity of contemporary sources; on the other hand, it is highly disputed just how many genuine traditions reaching back to the pagan past were still current during the Viking period. Thus it is commonly assumed that the Irish story of the Second Battle of Mag Tuired, presumably to be dated to the Viking period, is replete with characters based on the old pagan gods. Nevertheless, the plot of the story appears to reflect contemporary early medieval political conflicts rather than an ancient myth (Gray 1980–81 and 1982–83; Carey 1989–90). In any case, much of what is taken to be pagan in origin has not survived in its original context, but rather as the Christian transformation of a (supposedly) pagan antecedent. Thus it has been suggested that the Thingemote (Thing mound) in the Norse kingdom of Dublin 'may have pre-existed the Norse conquest and been an inauguration mound (*forad*) of the previous Gaelic kings' (Crawford 2014: 77). While

this may well be true, it is after all not more than a possibility based on inferences drawn from similar sites. Moreover, we have no means of ascertaining what the Vikings knew about the site and how they viewed its pre-Viking past. Likewise, the *Annals of Ulster* relate for the year 862 that the megalithic tombs of Knowth and Dowth (called *uam Cnodhbai* ('the cave of Cnodhba') and *uam Fheirt Boadan os Dubadh* ('the cave of Fert Boadan over Dubadh') respectively) were searched by Vikings (Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983: 318–19). The annalist's remark that this was something *quod antea non perfectum est* ('which has not been done before') may well indicate that the Irish regarded these prehistoric monuments with a kind of awe which the Vikings lacked, but there is no evidence to show just how the Vikings approached such remnants of the pre-Christian (and, in this case, pre-Celtic) past.

Rather different questions are raised by the consideration that Viking contacts with the Celtic-speaking population of Britain and Ireland may have sparked off new possibilities of interpreting the relationship between their own paganism and the new religion of Christianity, modelled on those approaches which the Irish and the British had adopted to deal with their own pagan past. Thus it has been noted that the co-existence of pre-Christian and Christian symbols on Viking picture stones in the Irish Sea province may reflect a Viking adaptation of the Irish habit of viewing 'the old mythology as prefigurations or antitypoi of the new Christian doctrine' (Rekdal 2014). It must, however, be stressed that the religious significance of such symbols is difficult to assess and that the 'inclusion of pagan motifs on Christian related art, which can be seen in several of the insular picture stones and crosses, could [...] be understood as a way of stressing Norse ancestry and mentality, even within a new religious context' (Glørstad 2014). This caveat also applies to the depiction of deities: 'It is clear that the Norse pantheon played significant roles in both belief and culture, so that we do not have to assume that all the members of this pantheon were the objects of cult practices, or that all evidence for the members of this pantheon indicates religious belief' (Jesch 2011: 21). What complicates matters further is the fact that the Viking transition from paganism to Christianity is difficult to pinpoint in many Celtic-speaking regions (Dumville 2002: 227; Abrams 2007 and 2010).

In sum, the direct and indirect evidence for cultural contacts between the Scandinavians and the Celtic-speaking populations of Ireland and the British Isles, involving perceptions of their respective pre-Christian religions, is both meagre and elusive, raising many more questions than it answers. For this reason, it is difficult to know whether intriguing similarities between 'Celtic' and Norse traditions are due to comparatively late contacts during the Viking period or rather to other causes.

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1.5 – The Reception of Early Nordic Religions and Myths in Old Rus'

Vladimir Ja. Petrukhin and Tatjana N. Jackson

Traces of early Nordic religions and myths in the East Slavic milieu are quite sparse. Still, it seems quite natural to investigate the impact of Scandinavian traditions on the emerging culture of Old Rus' from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, as the very name *Rus'* — a designation of a Scandinavian retinue travelling in rowing boats — was given by the Baltic Finns (and through their agency by the Slavs) to these retinues that started moving along the rivers of Eastern Europe from the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries (Noonan 1986; Melnikova and Petrukhin 1990–91). It is evident that contacts between Scandinavians and eastern Slavs that could enable the penetration of religious beliefs and myths could not have started earlier than this time: 'It was in the tenth century that Norse culture was at its height in Eastern Europe and interacted intensively with local cultural traditions. The immediate result was the formation of a mixed multi-ethnic culture of Old Russian warrior elite, the so-called retinue culture' (Melnikova 2003: 66). Old Russian book culture developed about a hundred years after the adoption of Christianity in 988. Accordingly, written sources that could reflect pagan motifs are rather limited and are coloured by standard Christian approaches to pagan religions.

Vladimir Petrukhin is Professor of Russian History at the Russian State University of Humanities and chief researcher at the Institute of Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. His most recent book is *Rus' in the IXth–Xth centuries* (2014).

Tatjana N. Jackson is a Doctor of History and Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. She studies Old Norse literature as a source for the history of Eastern Europe.

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However, a good number of archaeological materials have been excavated in the last hundred years or so that throw light on the reception of Scandinavian religious ideas and practices in Eastern Europe. This chapter examines both the textual tradition and the archaeological record.

The Textual Tradition

The Russian Primary Chronicle, compiled in Kiev at the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, includes several narratives about Rus' rulers that have analogues in medieval Icelandic sources. They employ similar strategies of historicizing ruling dynasties that we also find in Norse sources like Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* and the *Heimskringla* attributed to Snorri Sturluson (see Chapter 2.1.1 'The Learned Prehistory and Natural Religions', below). A legend of the calling-in to Novgorod of the three Varangian (Scandinavian) princes, the brothers Rjurik, Sineus and Truvor, has been preserved (s.a. 862) in *The Russian Primary Chronicle* (Likhachev *et al.* 1996: 13; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953: 59). They were invited to rule and reign after a special *rjad* ('agreement') and brought with them from overseas the Varangian armed force, 'all the Rus'', the name of which spread over the lands of Eastern Europe subordinate to the Russian princes in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Rjurik became a founder of the dynasty, the descendants of which ruled in ancient and medieval Rus' until the end of the sixteenth century. There are numerous parallels to the motif of three brothers being the rulers of a people, but in the *Primary Chronicle* this motif is incorporated into the universal scheme of acts of three culture heroes: the chronicle begins (in its cosmographic introduction) with the biblical story of how the sons of Noah (Shem, Ham and Japhet) divided the earth; continues with a narration concerning the foundation of the future capital of Christian Rus', Kiev, by three brothers Kij, Shchek and Khoriv; and in its historical part there follows (s.a. 862) the legend of the three Varangian princes. Scandinavian names of invited rulers preserved in the archaic Slavonic transmission — Rjurik (<Old Norse *Hrærekr*), Sineus (<Old Norse *Signjótr*) and Truvor (<Old Norse *Þórvar[ð]r*) — point to the Scandinavian component of the legend that we find in the chronicle. However, unlike the euhemerized heathen deities that are found in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon dynastic ruler lists, there is no mention of heathen deities, and this is probably to be accounted for as a suppression on the part of the Russian monastic chronicler. The similarity of early state symbols (as well as that of burial monuments, namely, the big mounds, to be discussed below) in both Old Rus' and Scandinavia gives ground for the supposition that there existed in Rus' the same genealogical traditions as in Scandinavia.

As has been implied above, the tradition of chronicle writing originated in a monastic milieu after the Christianization of the Rus', and thus pagan motifs are extremely rare in Old Russian written texts, especially motifs to do with non-Christian religious beliefs or practices. One legend with a probable Scandinavian basis shows an awareness of identifiably Scandinavian practices of prophecy and magic. These occur in a detailed story in the *Primary Chronicle* dealing with the death of Rjurik's heir, Oleg the Prophetic (or, 'the Sage'), in Kiev, which had been seized by Oleg in 912 according to a conventional chronicle dating. The prince received his nickname after a successful campaign against Tsar'grad (Constantinople). It has been proposed that the nickname was a perception of the sacred meaning of the Scandinavian personal name Helgi ('Holy') (Melnikova 2005). The story ran that in the autumn the prince called his horse to mind: some wonder-working magician had prophesied that he would meet his death from his steed, so he gave a command that the horse should never be led into his presence. Asking for the whereabouts of the horse, Oleg learnt that it was dead. He laughed and mocked the magician, rode to the place where the bare bones lay and stamped upon the skull with his foot. A serpent that crawled forth from it bit him on the foot, and he died (Likhachev *et al.* 1996: 69). Scholars have long ago pointed to the similarity of the two plots, the death of Oleg and that of the hero of the Icelandic *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* from the end of the thirteenth or even the beginning of the fourteenth century, as well as to universal parallels to the motif 'a horse causes (or foretells) its master's death'.

Another chronicle motif that is traditionally associated in scholarly literature with Scandinavian traditions of death and burial refers to the death of Oleg's heir, who also had a name of Scandinavian origin, Igor' (<Old Norse *Yngvarr*). This prince of Kiev tried to collect from his subjects, the Slavic tribe of Drevljanians (living on the right-hand shore of the Middle Dnieper), a tribute larger than the one laid down by the *rjad* ('agreement'), and was killed by the rebel Drevljanians in the autumn of 945 like 'a wolf'. Igor's widow, Olga, pretended that she would graciously welcome the 'matchmakers' from the Drevljanians, so that they would give her a new husband, their 'good' prince Mal. But then she started to take her revenge on the embassies arriving from the Drevljanians: in the case of the first one, she commanded them to be buried alive in a deep ditch, together with their boat; the second one was ordered to be burned to death in a bathhouse; finally, she commanded her retinue to fall upon those Drevljanians who had got drunk at a funeral feast near her husband's mound (Likhachev *et al*. 1996: 27–28; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953: 78–80). These three ways of executing the Drevljanians can be associated with Scandinavian rituals (ritualized violence): burning enemies in a house is

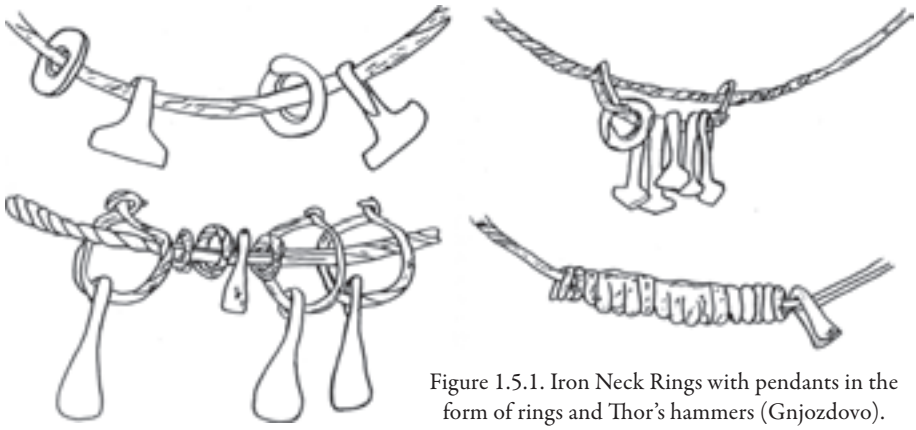

Figure 1.5.1. Iron Neck Rings with pendants in the form of rings and Thor's hammers (Gnjozdovo). Image courtesy of Galina Novikova.

Figure 1.5.2. Bronze pocket idol from Černaya Mogila. Ancient Russia, GIM 76990 on. 1539/77. Černigov, Černaya Mogila. Tenth century. Photograph courtesy of the State Historical Museum, Moscow.

a common motif in Icelandic sagas, and interment alive (in a boat) and a sacrifice at the funeral are characteristic features of the Scandinavian funeral cult and penal system (Ström 1942: 189–209). Olga, organizing the punishment of the Drevljanians, acts like a valkyrie choosing her victim.

The Archaeological Record

It is remarkable that Scandinavians in Rus' preserved the cult of Þórr as their *private cult* throughout the tenth century, judging by numerous amulets in the form of Þórr's hammers (cf. Lindow 2002: 288–90) found in Scandinavian burial complexes in Eastern Europe (Figure 1.5.1) (Novikova 1992).

Tenth-century miniature figurines of 'pocket' idols also correlate with the cult of Þórr: a bronze one from a mound Chernaja Mogila 'Black Grave' in Chernigov with a typical gesture

Figure 1.5.3. Lead pocket idol from Černaya Mogila. Ancient Russia, GIM 111421 on. 2778/254. Černigov, Černaya Mogila. Tenth century. Photograph courtesy of the State Historical Museum, Moscow.

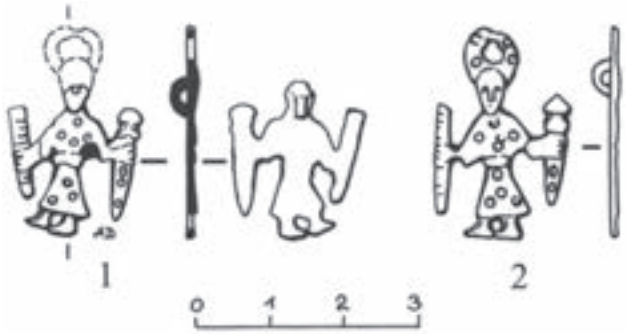

Figure 1.5.4. Amulet pendants of soldiers wearing helmets with horns like bird heads found in Gnjozdovo (1) and Birka (2). Image courtesy of Tamara Pushkina.

of the thunder god holding his beard with his hands (Figure 1.5.2) (Pushkina 1984; Petrukhin 2007: 64, fig. 38); less definitely, a lead figure from Gnjozdovo that has a belt, which is identified in Snorri's *Edda* (*SnE* 2005: 23) as one of the three attributes of the god Þórr, his *megingjǫrð* ('power-belt') (Figure 1.5.3) (Melnikova 1996: 73–89).

Notice should also be taken of Þórr's hammers scratched on Islamic coins from tenth-century hoards in Eastern and Northern Europe (cf. Melnikova 1996: 73–89), as well as of finds of remains of goats in rich burials from Gnjozdovo and Chernigov (Rybakov 1949; Petrukhin 1975), which may also indicate the cult of Þórr as *hafra dróttinn* ('the lord of goats'). It is not easy to give a mythological attribution to the amulets and images of warriors wearing helmets with horns like bird heads, except to say that they have been found both in Sweden at Birka and at Gnjozdovo in Rus' territory (Figure 1.5.4).

Clay paws and rings are considered to have been a typically East European set of amulets produced especially for burial rites: several dozen complexes have been excavated in the mounds of the Upper Volga region among Scandinavian finds. Clay paws are an imitation of bear paws, and they are known all over Northern Eurasia wherever there is a bear cult: a full analogy to the Upper Volga amulets has been found in the Åland Islands colonized in the Viking

Age by Swedish migrants who reached the Upper Volga region (Callmer 1994; Sedykh 2012). The bear cult is universally associated with the cult of fertility, and in the Old Rus' context with the cult of Volos, 'god of cattle' (Sedykh 2012); clay rings, unknown in Scandinavia, might possibly imitate bracelets, that is, they may have functioned as amulet-rings.

Metal rings, found both in Scandinavia and in Old Rus', are another kind of amulet. They could be used both as separate fetishes and as 'key rings' for amulets, Þórr's hammers among them (Price 2002: 203–04). Also known are rings with ring-amulets, like those found in Gnjozdovo and at Rjurikovo Gorodishche near Novgorod (Eniosova 2012). A set of such amulets from Gnjozdovo settlement includes not only an amulet in the form of an iron *kresalo* (fire steel), traditional for both Scandinavia and Rus', but also temporal rings, to be hung around the forehead, typical of the local culture of long barrows (Eniosova 2012: 258–60). The most impressive of the recent finds is a hoard of trade supplies in the 'port' zone of Gnjozdovo (excavations of V. V. Murasheva and S. A. Avdusina in 2013): in a wooden container, scales were kept with different weights and a set of amulets — fire steels and a Þórr's hammer on a ring; the container itself was locked by means of an iron chain; as extra protective amulets, a fire steel and iron ring were dug into the earth, together with the container. A special category of miniature amulets in the form of staffs has been discussed (Dorofeeva 2010); a staff is a widespread cult attribute also known from Scandinavia. Joachim Werner (1964) pointed long ago to a possible connection between European amulets of this type with Hercules's clubs and Þórr's hammers.

Amulets are found in the cultural layer of those settlements where Scandinavians used to live permanently (and they might even have been produced there), namely, in Ladoga, where moulds for casting Þórr's hammers were excavated, and pendants in the form of a valkyrie at Rjurikovo Gorodishche and in Novgorod, as well as in Gnjozdovo. In Novgorod Scandinavian finds are met in smaller numbers than at Gorodishche, the oldest district of Novgorod; however, amulets, pendants and runic inscriptions indicate the presence of Scandinavians in Novgorod as well. Moreover, the pendant in the form of a Þórr's hammer and some decorations were made by local artisans, which indicates the introduction of Scandinavian traditions to Novgorodian everyday life (Rybina and Khvoshchinskaja 2010: 66–78). Amulet-pendants from Ladoga and two from Gorodishche bear runic inscriptions: the latter two are invoked to protect their owner's virility, while the former includes a spell from an incantation to protect the owner from evil creatures (Figure 1.5.5) (Melnikova 1997: 31–33, 38).

Numerous runic graffiti are found on coins that have been discovered separately and in hoards: the commonest group of runes forms just one word, *goð*, a noun that can mean both the Christian God and a pagan deity. Among the graffiti drawings on coins, one comes across images of crosses as well as of Þórr's hammers. Combinations of symbols on one coin are quite possible and characterize the 'double faith' of merchants and warriors who accepted new beliefs while travelling international routes (Mikkelsen 2002; Sedykh 2005). A widespread motif among graffiti in Eastern Europe is the triquetra (a three-cornered shape), which may be connected with the cult of Óðinn, judging from images of a hero's arrival in Valhalla on Gotlandic picture stones. A triquetra is scratched, in particular, on a silver mount on a drinking horn from Gnjozdovo mound (Eniosova 2009: 262–64), which may be connected with the notion of warriors feasting in Valhalla. Among unique finds is a walrus tusk from Rjurikovo Gorodishche with a triquetra scratched on it and a triangle formed by three feet (Eniosova 2012: 62–63), possibly designed to assist its owner in travel.

The most numerous monuments connected with Scandinavian religious cults in Rus' are burial mounds of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, among them hundreds of complexes on the Upper Dnieper (Gnjozdovo), the Upper Volga, the Desna (Shestovitsa and Chernigov) and in Kiev. Burial rites seem to have synthesized all characteristics of Scandinavian cults in

Figure 1.5.5. Amulet pendant from Ladoga with a runic inscription, no. SAZ-75 LP-1/1303. Photograph courtesy of the Staroladozhsky Historical, Architectural and Archaeological museum, Ladoga.

Eastern Europe, and the majority of amulets come from burial complexes. The most impressive type of Scandinavian burial ritual is, of course, cremation in a boat, described in detail by a tenth-century Arabian traveller and diplomat Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, who saw such a ritual in Bulgar on the Volga in 921/22 (see the analysis of this description in Chapter 1.6 below). This description most fully correlates with the ceremony traced in the largest Old Russian tenth-century mound Chernaja Mogila (in Chernigov): on a pyre there may have been placed (judging by sets of weapons) two warriors and a woman; boat rivets indicate that they were burned in a boat. Similar large mounds, from two to ten metres high, were investigated in the late nineteenth century in Chernigov and Gnjozdovo.

Typical features of the burial rites attested by the large mounds of both Rus' and Scandinavia are as follows: 'pagan' inhumation or cremation (in Rus'), often in a boat; the use of weapons and banquet vessels, sometimes placed on a fire site in a special way (weapons as a 'trophy'); as well as sacrifice (including human sacrifice). A sacrificial cauldron with the skin and bones of a goat (or sheep) eaten during the funeral feast was located in the centre of the fire site in the mounds of Gnjozdovo and Chernigov (in the Chernaja Mogila — on a primary embankment, near the figurine of Þórr). We may compare the situation discovered in the mound Skopintul at the royal estate Hovgården near Birka, the main Scandinavian town on the way 'from the Varangians to the Greeks', where a cauldron contained human hair (that might have belonged to a victim, like the girl described by Ibn Faḍlān), and that in the biggest mound of the cemetery at Kvarnbacken in the Åland Islands, from where a group of Scandinavians moved to the Upper Volga region in the mid-ninth to tenth centuries.

In both Russian and Scandinavian scholarly literature the mounds are traditionally called princely or royal. Scandinavian tradition has preserved legends concerning the kinship of those buried in the big mounds. Gamla Uppsala was an ancient capital of the dynasty of Ynglingar, kings of Svealand, whose progenitor, via Yngvi-Freyr, is presented in Old Norse texts like *Heimskringla* as Óðinn himself. To understand the origins of the princely cult in Rus', it is important to note that the names of the first princes — Rjurik, Oleg (Helgi) Igor' (Yngvarr, an anthroponym connected to the name of the deity Yngvi-Freyr) — are princely names both in Scandinavian and in Old Russian traditions: this allows us to suppose not only the ethnic and cultural, but also possibly the early genealogical connections of the princely families that used to bury their members under the big mounds (Roesdahl 1996: 67–68, 164; Petrukhin 2013: 120–27).

The introduction of Christianity in Rus' and the Scandinavian countries led to similar transformations of burial rites: the remains of many rulers who had died in pre-Christian times — Gormr in Denmark, the princes Yaropolk and Oleg in Rus' — were translated from big mounds into the churches. After the mid-tenth century the grave goods of the elite representatives include crosses, along with traditional decorations, mostly in female burials in the chamber tombs of Birka, Kiev, Gnjozdovo, Timerjovo, Pskov and other sites (Petrukhin and Pushkina 1997; Melnikova 2011). Pagan amulets lose their specifically non-Christian semantic value in Christian everyday life and become simple decorations: a striking example is a necklace from the Kievan hoard of the twelfth or early thirteenth century found in the territory of Mikhajlov monastery in 1903, where silver pendants, usually referred to as cross-shaped, are amulets in the form of Þórr's hammers (the so-called Hiddensee type), while the central object is a cross (Petrukhin 2013: 354, fig. 72).

The penetration and development of elements of pre-Christian Nordic religion and myths in Rus' (and in Eastern Europe more generally) was obviously due to the penetration of Scandinavian communities into the area (in the first place, the *Rus'* itself, i.e., the princely retinue) and their life in the emerging urban centres and surrounding territories. Their cults and myths were to a small degree accepted by the culture of Old Rus', which was, however, based on another language and, moreover, characterized by Christian literacy, but was transformed under local influence, while not losing its essentially Scandinavian character. There appeared new forms of cult objects, like clay rings and other amulets produced out of local materials, while Eastern coins served for making crosses and amulet-pendants. The area of the most commonly occurring amulets, Þórr's hammers and other objects, unites Eastern Europe with central and eastern Sweden, from where the majority of Scandinavian Viking Age objects come; similar burial complexes are also found, like burials in a boat, chamber graves and large princely mounds. Scandinavian motifs, both religious and related to arts and crafts, are typically deprived of their religious (mythological) content in the process of Christianization as perceived in Old Rus' literature, and in this respect Old Rus' texts conform to one of the commonest types of medieval Christian reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North, in which myths are treated as faded histories or legends.

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1.6 – The Reception in Early Arabic Writings

Jan Retsö

From the middle of the ninth century AD onwards, people who are obviously Scandinavians appear in Arabic literature, in historical records and works on geography and travel. The passages in medieval Arabic literature that mention Scandinavians were collected and edited by Alexander Seippel in 1878. The excerpts were taken from the editions available at that time but, when possible, compared with manuscripts, the result of which was presented in an extensive *apparatus criticus*. Seippel's texts were translated into Norwegian and further commented by Harris Birkeland in 1954. These two editions (Seipppel 1878; Birkeland 1954) form the basis of modern studies of early Arabic sources that describe Scandinavian peoples and their customs.

The main criterion for selecting texts referring to Scandinavians on the part of both authors was the occurrence in them of four key terms: *majūs*, *urmān*, *warank* and *rūs* or *rūsiyyah*. Seippel arranged the excerpts according to this terminology. Birkeland instead gave the texts in chronological order, which is more convenient for the historian. His commentary deals extensively with historical matters and is a basic contribution to the subject. Both works are still essential for the study of medieval Arabic perceptions of the Scandinavian Other. A recent general survey is given by James Montgomery (Montgomery 2008).

Among the terms used, the first, *majūs*, and the last, *rūs* or *rūsiyyah*, are the most frequent and important. The second term, *urmān*, is most likely derived from *nordhmadhur* (Old Norse *norðmaðr*, usually meaning 'Norwegian' but here more likely to refer to Scandinavians from Sweden). *Warank* is identical

Jan Retsö is Professor of Arabic at the University of Gothenburg. His recent publications include *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (2003).

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with the Old Norse *væringr*/*væringi*, 'Varangian, a Norseman in the service of the Byzantine emperor'; it is also found in Old Russian sources as *var'ag*. It occurs for the first time in an Arabic source by al-Bīrūnī (–1048 = Birkeland 1954: 60).

After almost two centuries of heated debate about the origin and meaning of the term *rūs*, the most likely solution is still that it originally referred to Scandinavians from Sweden in present-day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. It also refers to the ruling dynasty of the Kievan state, which was of Scandinavian descent (see Chapter 1.5 above) and occasionally also to the people, mostly Slavonic-speaking, ruled by them. The most problematic term is the first, *majūs*, which originally referred to Iranians, especially the followers of the Zoroastrian religion, but which, for some reason, was also later used as a designation for Scandinavians. In general, *rūs* is used for Scandinavians appearing in the east: Eastern Europe, the regions around the Black and the Caspian Seas (Golden 1955a), whereas *majūs* are those active around the Iberian peninsula and the western Mediterranean (Melvinger 1986). In one of the earliest Arabic sources, al-Yaᶜqūbī's *Tārīkh* ('Chronicle') (Birkeland 1954: 13), written in the middle of the ninth century, *rūs* and *majūs* are explicitly identified with one another in connection with the report of the first assault by the latter on southern Spain in 843.

A term often occurring together with those already mentioned is *ṣaqālibah*, a plural of *ṣaqlab* (cf. Golden 1995b). This is the Greek word *sklábos* which in its turn is Modern English 'Slav', thus designating the Slavonic-speaking inhabitants of Eastern Europe. As a rule the Arabic sources, with one exception, Ibn Khorradādhbeh (–849 AD), distinguish between the *ṣaqālibah* and the terms for Norsemen already mentioned. Ibn Khorradādhbeh, whose work is the earliest source preserved in its original shape that mentions the Norsemen, in fact explicitly equates the *rūs* and the *ṣaqālibah*, a practice not followed by his successors (Birkeland 1954: 11).

A survey of the passages adduced by the two scholars Seippel and Birkeland shows that the religious customs and beliefs of the Norsemen are rarely referred to in detail. A feature that is repeatedly mentioned is their burial customs. Both Ibn Rustah and Ibn Faḍlān mention them, although describing them differently. Both writers composed their texts shortly after 922 AD. According to Ibn Rustah, the wife of a deceased nobleman among the *rūsiyyah* is buried alive together with him in a grave that is dug out from the ground (Birkeland 1954: 16–17). Ibn Faḍlān describes how a female slave dies with her master by being burnt together with him (Birkeland 1954: 21). The burning of the dead is from this point a standing topos in the Arabic descriptions of the *rūs* and *majūs*. From al-Istakhrī, a couple of decades after Ibn Faḍlān, we hear about the burning of a dead nobleman together with his slave girls, a passage which

might be dependent upon Ibn Faḍlān (Birkeland 1954: 29). Since this custom was (and is) contrary to Islamic practice, it is understandable that the Muslim writers paid special attention to it (cf. al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* II. 7–10, III. 64 = Birkeland 1954: 33; Ibn Ḥawqal 285–86 = Birkeland 1954: 50; Idrīsī 71 = Birkeland 1954: 71).

In the descriptions of the religious customs of the *majūs* we also hear about their worship of fire and marriages between closely related family members. This is mentioned for the first time in the account of Yaḥyā b. Ḥakam al-Ghazāl's visit to the *majūs* around 840 AD. This account is found in a work written four hundred years later by Ibn Diḥyah (–1235 = Birkeland 1954: 83–88) and, in his rendering, it is a romantic short story. It might, however, go back to an original report of a factual visit. Due to its literary character, the historical value of the account has been regarded as low. It has been claimed that the report about the worship of fire among the *rūs*/*majūs* reflects an inheritance from the Indo-European past identical to the one found in Iran (Melvinger 1955: 77–85). This is hardly likely to be correct. The evidence for fire worship among the Norsemen and their close relatives is scanty to say the least (cf. de Vries 1956–57: I, 360–61). It is much more likely that this claim is due to the confusion caused by the use of the term *majūs* originally designating the Zoroastrian priesthood, the *magoi*, guarding the holy fire. The burning of the dead said to be a common custom among the *majūs* and the *rūs* is incompatible with the Iranian fire cult which did not tolerate the holy fire being sullied by the dead. The reason for applying the term *majūs* to the inhabitants of the northernmost regions is more likely to go back to an ancient idea about the wild peoples of the north shut in by Alexander the Great by means of a copper gate in the Caucasus according to the Alexander romance (see Stoneman 2008: 174–89, 182–85). The most prominent of those peoples were Gog and Magog or, in Arabic, Yājūj and Mājūj (as mentioned in the Qur'an 18: 94). The identification between Magog and the Iranian *magoi* is found in the *Chronicon* by Georgios Monachos written around 850 AD, although the original is probably earlier (De Boor 1904: I, 11).

On closer inspection it turns out that the Arabic writers were not very well informed about religious and other customs among the Norsemen. The case of the *majūs* clearly shows their dependence on earlier literary sources that were not evaluated critically. Another example of this tendency is the claim that the *rūs*/*majūs* live on an island in the northern ocean, also mentioned for the first time by al-Ghazāl. This notice ultimately goes back to ancient Greek geographers describing Thule as an island far to the north (see Chapter 1.1 above). Even if their claim may originally have been based on some concrete informa-

tion, it is highly unlikely that the Arab writers had any independent observations to refer to.

Only a couple of writers give fuller details about the customs of the Norsemen. Two of these texts were written in the tenth century by Ibn Rustah and Ibn Faḍlān respectively. Another is al-Qazwīnī (–1283) who quotes a source also written in the tenth century. Ibn Rustah gives a description of the *rūsiyyah* which has a realistic ring. They do not own landed property but plunder the *ṣaqālibah*, take them as slaves and sell them to the Khazars and Bulgars. He describes how conflicts among them may be solved by a procedure which looks very much like a *holmganga*, literally 'island going', an Old Norse term for a duel that often took place on small islands or other pieces of neutral territory. They have a king, *malik*, who acts as an arbiter in conflicts. Their main authorities are wise men, *aṭibbā*, literally 'doctors', who order them to sacrifice humans and cattle to 'God' (Allāh). The sacrifice is performed by hanging the victim on a wooden pole until it dies. When a nobleman dies, he is laid in a dug grave together with his favourite wife, who is buried alive with him (Birkeland 1954: 15–17). This custom is also documented in some Scandinavian sources (de Vries 1956–57: I, 155; Turville-Petre 1964: 272–73). Al-Qazwīnī quotes a report by aṭ-Ṭartūshī, who was an ambassador from the Umayyad court in Cordova to Otto the Great of Germany. (We are thus in the tenth century.) He has a short description of a sacrifice by people at a place named Salsawīq (possibly Slesvig). They are said to be worshippers of the star Sirius, which may only be a way of indicating that they are pagans. They have a feast in honour of the god when they slaughter an animal: a sheep, a goat or a pig. Then they raise up a kind of wooden construction, putting the victim on it in order to show that they have performed the sacrifice properly (Birkeland 1954: 103–04). Al-Qazwīnī and aṭ-Ṭartūshī do not explicitly say that these people are *rūsiyyah*, but the context speaks in favour of it. Besides, there are some similarities to rituals involving sacrificial animals mentioned in indigenous Scandinavian sources (de Vries 1956–57: I, 418).

The only source in Arabic which gives details about religious customs among the *rūs* is the *risālah* ('report') written by Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, who visited the Volga region in 922 AD. Until 1923 Ibn Faḍlān's text was known only from quotations by other medieval writers. The earliest one is by Aḥmad aṭ-Ṭūsī (–*c.*1170) who wrote a geographical handbook quoting from an earlier work which contained texs by three writers dealing with geography: Ibn Faqīh, Abū Dulaf and Ibn Faḍlān. The most important is Yāqūt (–1229) who, in his vast geographical encyclopaedia *Muʿjam al-buldān* ('The Geographical Dictionary'), quotes Ibn Faḍlān's report from a similar collection of

texts, perhaps the same work, containing the three geographers (Wüstenfeld 1866–73: *Muʿjam* III, 445–58). Yāqūt claims to have seen several other copies of Ibn Faḍlān's *risālah*. He also claims that Ibn Faḍlān told about his return to Baghdad, something that is not found in any of the other versions. Yāqūt further has a long excerpt from our author dealing with the Khazars, which is not found in any other version either. Ibn Faḍlān's *risālah* is also quoted by al-Qazwīnī, whose work is based on Yāqūt's text which, however, is treated quite freely. Finally, ar-Rāzī (–1593) gives an excerpt which derives from a text different from that of Yāqūt which is perhaps based on a Persian translation of the version used by aṭ-Ṭūsī. The texts of aṭ-Ṭūsi, al-Qazwīnī and ar-Rāzī are more verbose than Yāqūt's version but the exact relationship between all these second-hand versions is still not quite clear.

In 1923 Zeki Validi Togan found a manuscript in Meshhed in Iran containing Ibn Faḍlān's *risālah* written in the seventeenth century but representing the same textual tradition as the one used by Yāqūt. It also contains the texts by the other two geographers that were used by him. This anthology of geographical works was put together before 1170 and after 950 AD. The Meshhed manuscript is in rather bad shape, and several passages must be emended by using the secondhand versions. The section on the Khazars is missing, but we know that it belonged to the *risālah* since Yāqūt quotes it. The style is quite unsophisticated and shows no traces of literary refinement. Further, some of the usual motifs in Arabic geographical literature such as descriptions of monsters, magic and sensational information about peoples at the ends of the world are absent. Yāqūt's version is stylistically better and gives the impression of being a reworked version of the text of the Meshhed manuscript. The language of the manuscript in fact contains some grammatical mistakes that might be original, and it can be argued that the quotations from Ibn Faḍlān by the other writers all represent a continuous reworking of the original stylistically quite primitive text. It can be deduced that the writer was not a native Arabic speaker, rather an Iranian who had learnt Arabic as a second language. It is said in the Introduction that the author was in fact the descendant of a *mawlā*, which usually means a non-Arab. The impression is that of an author with modest literary education. He says himself that he is an Islamic *ʿālim*, that is, a scribe, which could explain the absence of literary refinement.

The Meshhed manuscript was edited by Togan in 1939 in an edition which has received some criticism. A new edition was prepared for the Arab Academy in Damascus by S. Dahhān and published in 1959. A facsimile of the Meshhed manuscript was published in 1987 (Sezgin *et al.* 1987). Most recent editions and translations are based on Dahhān's edition, including that by Macintosh-

Smith and Montgomery (2014) for the *Sources* database of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North project. However, a first-class edition of Ibn Faḍlān's text with a thorough study of the entire textual tradition is still a desideratum.

The *risālah* describes an expedition dispatched by the caliph al-Muqtadir (908–32) in the year 921 AD. According to the text, the reason was a demand from the king of the Bulgars for an Islamic mission. Ibn Faḍlān says that he was the one responsible for that part of the expedition. We are, however, *en passant*, informed that the king had demanded to build a fortress against his enemy, the king of the Khazars. The leader of the expedition was a certain Sawsan ar-Rasī, a high-ranking official who we know played a crucial role in the military *coup d'état* which had deposed 'the one-day caliph' Ibn al-Muʿtazz, better known as one of the great poets of Arabic literature, and replaced him with al-Muqtadir in 908 AD. The real purpose of the expedition was thus to establish an alliance between the Bulgars and the caliph in Baghdad directed against the Khazars, who at this time were the prolonged arm of the Byzantine emperor: we are, once again *en passant*, informed that the king of the Khazars was the subject of that emperor. This alliance was probably also directed against the Samanids in Bukhara, who were officially the governors of the caliph in Central Asia but who were pursuing their own expansionist policy beyond the Aral Sea into the Volga region. Their interest in this area is amply demonstrated by the enormous number of Islamic coins found in Scandinavia, most of which come from the mint of the Samanids in Bukhara (cf. Gullbeck 2008: 161–62; Metcalf 1997). Ibn Faḍlān was thus in charge of the ideological component of this mission, that is, he was the caliph's politruk.

The *risālah* is a travel account told in the first person, a genre which emerged in Arabic literature during the ninth century. The first documented specimen is probably the report of the journey made by al-Muṭṭawiʿī to the Uigurs in 821, followed by Sallām at-Tarjumān in the 840s and the account by Yaḥyā al-Ghazāl, referred to above. To this genre also belong the account of Abū Dulaf, which is found in the anthology together with that of Ibn Faḍlān. It culminates with the works of Ibn Jubayr (–1217/18) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (–1377/78), two of the great classics of Arabic literature.

In spite of the blatantly political aim of the mission, the *risālah* does not give the impression of an official report. The political aim of the expedition disappears, and many details connected with it are never clarified. Instead we have a travel account for people who are interested in foreign countries. Since Ibn Faḍlān's text is found in an anthology of texts which all deal with Central Asia and its immediate surroundings, it can be assumed that it was edited in Bukhara rather than Baghdad. After 950 there was no government in Baghdad

with ambitions in Central Asia or Russia any longer. But even the Meshhed manuscript is not the complete original of Ibn Faḍlān, and this is evident from Yāqūt's quotation. It is an excerpt of sections that were of interest for the reading public at the court of the Samanid dynasty (819–999).

The text dealing with the *ar-rūsiyyah*, usually understood as Scandinavians, may be divided into several sections. Like almost all his colleagues Ibn Faḍlān distinguishes between *rūs* and *ṣaqālibah*. By the latter the (Volga) Bulgars are clearly understood. These sections contain four main themes: the physical shape of the *rūsiyyah* and their equipment, their hygiene (or rather their lack of hygiene) and sexual customs; a sacrifice in connection with business transactions; their mortuary ceremonies; and, finally, a short notice about the status of their chief.

Ibn Faḍlān's account has a sober documentary tone which has generated a very high evaluation of it as a first-class historical source. It looks like the first journalistic report in world literature. It is thus worthwhile to take a closer look at it. A basic observation is that not everything told is based on personal observation. Ibn Faḍlān refers to what he has seen himself (*ra'aytu*, 'I saw') when describing the physical appearance of the *rūsiyyah* as well as the burial of their chief. The description of the ornaments used by them as well as the descriptions of their trading, the treatment of sickness and the customs at the court of the king are obviously based on interviews with someone who was supposed to know. The most famous passage — namely, the burning and the burial of the chieftain — is a mosaic of personal observation and secondary report. The ceremony of ship-burning and human sacrifice in connection with burials is now well attested in Scandinavian archaeological sources as well as in some texts (Price 2008; cf. de Vries 1956–57: 1, 140–56; Turville-Petre 1964: 272–73). Ibn Faḍlān had undoubtedly seen the burning himself, but the introductory ceremonies and some details during the burial itself, for example, the handling of the slave girls inside the tent, cannot have been observed by him. He also refers explicitly to an interpreter (*tarjumān*) who obviously has explained the ceremony and what was going on hidden from Ibn Faḍlān's sight. One should thus keep in mind that he was much more dependent upon an informant than is usually assumed. The accuracy of the reports by the *tarjumān* can also be doubted in some details. The famous and often quoted description of the low hygenic standard among the *rūsiyyah* is obviously based on an informant's report, and it is very doubtful if Ibn Faḍlān had any first-hand information about this. The description is also contradicted by Ibn Khorradādhbeh who, a hundred years earlier, emphasized the cleanliness of the *rūs* which accords well with what is known from Nordic sources about the issue (Magnus Már

Lárusson 1956–78; Möller-Christensen 1956–78). This story may well be something that a creative guide told a pious Muslim performing ablutions five times a day, who would be pleased to hear how primitive these infidels were in spite of their impressive physical appearance.

Even if Ibn Faḍlān might not be so trustworthy in all details, as many have wanted to believe, his report is still a unique document about the Scandinavians in the Middle Volga region at the time. He belongs among those writers whose straightforwardness and rudimentary literary education has preserved their ability to see things with fresh eyes. The result is a piece of instructive and even entertaining reading.

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Part 2

The View from Inside: Medieval Scandinavian Reception

2.0 – Introduction to Part 2

Margaret Clunies Ross

Christianity was relatively late arriving in the Scandinavian lands, by comparison with much of the rest of Western Europe. While Denmark and, to a lesser extent, parts of Sweden were exposed to Christian missionary activity during the ninth century, Norway's and Iceland's conversion took place from about 1000. This factor had two important consequences for the history of the reception of the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia. The first was that Scandinavian paganism and the Scandinavians' customary religious behaviour became a topic of report among chroniclers from societies that were already Christian, as Part 1 of this volume shows; and the second was that their relatively late conversion seems to have been one factor that allowed Scandinavian writers, from the twelfth century onwards, the relative freedom to record information about their pagan ancestors and the gods whose cults those ancestors observed. As the chapters below demonstrate, that freedom *was* a relative matter, and, even though no written texts (aside from short runic inscriptions) survive from the pre-Christian period in Scandinavia, those Christian writers who recorded their understanding of Scandinavian pre-Christian religions had to take care not to transgress certain guidelines and boundaries established by the Christian Church, whose dominant attitude to paganism during the Middle Ages was that pagan gods and their worship were illusions created by Satan and therefore potentially dangerous and misleading to Christians. That is why even the least polemical of writers, like the Icelander Snorri Sturluson, were careful to hedge around their presentations of pre-Christian religion and myth with framing narratives and other distancing devices.

As much research undertaken during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been at pains to show, we cannot take what medieval Scandinavian writers report about pre-Christian religions at face value. It is always necessary

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to remember three things: first, that they were reporting past customs that they themselves as Christians no longer practised; second, that they were reporting what they believed took place a long time ago, for which they may not necessarily have had any direct evidence aside from oral tradition; and third, that they may have been unaware of practices and beliefs that were not local to their own communities. However, having established all these caveats, it is still remarkable how much evidence is available about the pre-Christian religions of the North from medieval Scandinavian sources.

The sources themselves will be examined in the second section of this part, while the major themes and ideologies that guided medieval authors in framing their reports are the subject of the first section. The majority of these sources are in the Icelandic vernacular, though a certain proportion are Norwegian, and the Latin *Gesta Danorum* of the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus also provides an important witness. In this area of textuality as in other areas of historiography and fictive writing, Icelandic authors dominated the field in the medieval period, establishing their authority as guardians of all kinds of traditions of the past, first in poetry and then in the new literary genre of the saga, which often combined the resources of poetry and prose. Even historians writing in Latin, like Saxo Grammaticus (active *c.* 1200), acknowledged their debt to the Icelanders. Saxo saluted them in his preface as the historians of the whole of Scandinavia, suggesting that the long dark nights of winter and the barren Icelandic landscape may have stimulated their literary productivity (*Saxo* 2015: I, Pr. 1.4: 6–7).

According to Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* ('Book of the Icelanders') (written 1122–32), the conversion to Christianity in Iceland took place as a rational decision of the Althing or 'General Assembly' in the year 999 or 1000 and so it was somewhat different from the common Scandinavian and medieval European pattern of what historians call a top-down process, initiated by those in authority and then gradually accepted by the populace at large (Sawyer *et al.* 1987; Carver 2003). However, in spite of Ari's account, most modern scholarship indicates that the development of the Church in Iceland was a much slower and more gradual process than had previously been thought (cf. Orri Vésteinsson 2000: 17–19). Nor was the conversion to Christianity simply a religious phenomenon. The Church and the literate Latin culture it gave access to functioned as agents of change and the means by which a variety of new intellectual influences became available to medieval Icelanders, influences which they were able to combine with traditional, largely orally transmitted forms of expression to create new textual genres. It is in this context that we should understand the medieval reception by Icelanders of the pre-Christian religions of the North.

Section 2.1

Section 2.1 comprises four chapters that demonstrate some of the chief ideas that shaped the reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North in medieval Scandinavian writings. The subjects of the first three of these, the learned prehistory and natural religions, the diffusion of world languages and religions from the Tower of Babel and pagan religions as illusions created by demons, can be found in other medieval works on the subject of non-Christian religions because they derive from theories that were current among educated people in Europe from late antiquity up to the end of the Middle Ages. Indeed, one of the most interesting dimensions to the present chronologically oriented study of this subject is that it reveals how persistent several of these approaches have been long after the Middle Ages (cf. Clunies Ross 2006). We are reminded that some of the deepest-seated preconceptions of Western culture still influence the approaches that individuals and groups of people bring to phenomena that are outside the orbit of elite European cultural traditions, which have historically been based on the classical learning of Greece and Rome in combination with the teachings of the Christian Church.

Section 2.2

The second section of this survey of the medieval Scandinavian reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North investigates the nexus between medieval Scandinavian textual genres and their treatment of the subject of pre-Christian religion and myth. It demonstrates how certain kinds of text were expected to deal with certain kinds of subject, and in certain ways. On the other side, the unique aspects of some of the medieval texts considered are also stressed, because there are no real parallels within European medieval literature to the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda, and the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, the latter considered either as a mythography or indeed as a treatise on poetics.[1] The mythological resources of Old Norse skaldic poetry are also unprecedented and remarkable on other grounds too, not least because Christian poets still found the old mythological kenning system productive in a decorative fashion within a Christian context. This particular resource continued in use in Iceland in the *rímur* tradition right down to the beginning of the twentieth century.

[1] For an explanation of Old Norse-Icelandic literary genres, see 'Introduction to Volume 1' above.

Noteworthy also is how Nordic historiography develops several different ways of writing a history of Scandinavian pre-Christian religion: as a prelude to a dynastic history of the kings of Norway or (in Saxo) to the history of the kings of Denmark; as an exercise in conversion history, with Norwegian royal saints as protagonists; as an exploration of individual histories of particular Icelandic families (as in some *fornaldarsögur*); or as an explanation for the origins of pagan religions in learned treatises.

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2.1.1 – The Learned Prehistory and Natural Religions

Mats Malm

Die gelehrte Urgeschichte, 'the Learned Prehistory', is a shorthand label that has developed in scholarly literature not only to denote one strand of classical European learning as it appears in Old Norse sources, but also to underscore the inauthentic character of such constructs. An early example of the construction of the Learned Prehistory is the *Íslendingabók*, 'Book of the Icelanders', of Ari fróði 'the Wise' Þorgilsson (d. 1148). This gives a vernacular account of how Iceland was settled and developed but ends with a list of *nǫfn langfeðga Ynglinga ok Breiðfirðinga* ('names of the forefathers of the Ynglings and the Breiðafjörður-people'), starting with *I. Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr. II. Njǫrðr Svíakonungr. III. Freyr* (*ÍF* 1: 27) ('1 Yngvi king of the Turks. 2 Njǫrðr king of the Swedes. 3 Freyr'), before passing through a number of mythic characters and finally ending with Ari himself as number thirty-eight in the succession. Thus, persons and families could claim status and authority by connecting themselves to mythic characters of prehistory. Such ancestry could consist in deities of pre-Christian religion, euhemeristically converted into earthly rulers (such as Njǫrðr and Freyr in Ari's case) or in ancient heroes of the learned tradition, like Hercules or Aeneas.[1] Commonly, the claimed ancestry was a blend

[1] Euhemerism, to be discussed further below, is a mode of interpreting mythic events and persons as historical events and persons of the far past, whose true nature has been distorted in the passage of time, so that outstanding characters of the past are later held to be gods and their exploits myths. The approach is named after Euhemerus, an ancient Greek philosopher.

Mats Malm is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Gothenburg. His main fields are early modern and medieval Scandinavian literature and culture, as modelled on the heritage of antiquity.

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between pre-Christian religion and classical learning: Learned Prehistory and pre-Christian religion thus fuse in peculiar ways.

This method of enhancing one's position was common in the medieval European context, and the basic pattern was provided by the *Aeneid*, in which Vergil describes how Aeneas left Troy and founded the empire of Rome (Faulkes 1982; Weber 1986; Klingenberg 2003; cf. Simek 1990: 189–92). In the early twelfth century, the Welsh historian Geoffrey of Monmouth explained in his *De gestis Britonum* ('Concerning the Deeds of the Britons') (also known as *Historia regum Britanniae*, 'The History of the Kings of Britain') that the Anglo-Saxon rulers descended from Aeneas: his great-grandson, Brutus, had migrated from Italy and founded the empire of Britannia. Thus, Britain was endowed with a glorious past, and in the same way the seventh-century Frankish chronicler Fredegar had explained that the Franks derived from the Trojans, without, however, the detour by Rome. Parallel founders and kings are to be found throughout Europe, in the prehistories presented for several nations. The prehistory of Iceland and Scandinavia was to be much developed and tightly connected to the history of Troy, thereby putting the Scandinavian rulers on a par with those of continental Europe.

Arguments based on etymology are fundamental to the discourse of the Learned Prehistory, because ancestors are eponymic (Brutus, for example, is said to give his name to Britannia), and etymology is also the primary means of linking characters with similar names with one another. In the Old Norse Learned Prehistory the foundational connection was that between the Old Norse name for a pre-Christian god, *áss* (plural *æsir*), and the name of the continent of Asia (Old Norse *Asía*). The Æsir gods are thus explained as heroes who left Troy to found the Scandinavian nations in the same way as Aeneas did to found Rome. This connection corresponds to sources, like Ari's *Íslendingabók*, that do not explicate the *áss* etymology but yet declare that the gods/rulers migrated from Asia in the same way as Aeneas had done.[2]

The story of Troy was rendered from Latin into Old Norse in *Trójumanna saga* ('Saga of the Men of Troy'), probably originally composed in the early thirteenth century, and *Veraldar saga* ('Saga of the World') of *c.* 1200. Traces of the Learned Prehistory are to be found in a number of sources, including early dynastic poems such as *Ynglingatal* ('Enumeration of the Ynglingar') (Marold *et al.* 2012) and *Háleygjatal* ('Enumeration of the people of Hálogaland') (Poole 2012) right down to Arngrímur Jónsson's sixteenth-century Latin reca-

[2] In fact Ari mentions only the Vanir gods Njǫrðr and Freyr, a subordinate group among the Æsir, in his Learned Prehistory.

pitulation (Jakob Benediktsson 1950–57) of the now lost *Skjǫldunga saga* ('Saga of the Skjǫldungar'), Skjǫldungar being the name of the Danish royal dynasty. Most sources are brief; the two most elaborated accounts are found in the beginnings of *Heimskringla* ('Circle of the World') and *Edda* ('Poetics'), both works usually attributed to the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) (see Lassen 2011: 237–307).

According to *Ynglinga saga* ('Saga of the Ynglingar'), which offers an introductory background to the Norwegian history outlined in *Heimskringla*, Óðinn was the ruler of Ásgarðr, the capital of Ásaland in Asia and a place of much sacrifice.

> Þat var þar siðr, at tólf hofgoðar váru œztir. Skyldu þeir ráða fyrir blótum ok dómum manna í milli. Þat eru díar kallaðir eða dróttnar. Þeim skyldi þjónustu veita ok lotning allt fólk. Óðinn var hermaðr mikill ok mjǫk viðfǫrull ok eignaðisk mǫrg ríki. Hann var svá sigrsæll, at í hverri orrostu fekk hann gagn. (*ÍF* XXVI: 11)
>
> (The rule prevailed there that twelve temple priests were highest in rank. They were to have charge of sacrifices and to judge between men. They are called *díar* or chiefs. All the people were to serve them and show them reverence. Óðinn was a great warrior and travelled widely, conquering many countries. He was so victorious that he won the upper hand in every battle.)

The dealings between *æsir* and *vanir* are described in the same historicizing way, and it is then said that the Romans were putting pressure on the rulers in the area (*ÍF* XXVI: 14). Óðinn has the gift of prophecy and foresees that his future will be in the North, and so takes his people with him there. Distributing his family members on the way through Saxony, Denmark and Sweden, he himself settles in Sigtuna in Sweden, where the *æsir* outsmart the Swedish king Gylfi with tricks and delusions. In a sequence of fabulous accounts, Óðinn is succeeded on the throne by Njǫrðr, Freyr, Fjǫlnir and others until the story reaches somewhat more historical times and characters.

The Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* (*SnE* 2005: 3–6; Faulkes 1987: 1–5) introduces the cosmological myths of *Gylfaginning* ('The Deception of Gylfi') and the myths that in diverse ways are connected to the skaldic poetry of *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Speech of Poetry'), followed by the versificatory explanations of *Háttatal* ('List of Verse-Forms'). As *Gylfaginning* in its final lines (*SnE* 2005: 54–55; Faulkes 1987: 57–58) reconnects to the Learned Prehistory of the Prologue, the Prehistory in fact functions as a frame for the whole cosmology presented, as a delusion, by the *æsir* to the Swedish king Gylfi.[3]

[3] Of the four main manuscripts to *Snorra Edda*, the Codex Upsaliensis (U) is consider-

In the Prologue, Troy is described in similar fashion as in *Ynglinga saga*, but is also mentioned by the name Troja ('Troy'). The history of Troy is presented in more detail, with more ancestors of Óðinn mentioned and the names of classical sources more systematically identified with the names of Norse deities. Þórr (here an ancestor of Óðinn) is identified as Tror, grandson of King Priam of Troy; Sif, Þórr's wife, is identified as Sibil; while Óðinn's wife Frigg is identified as Frigida ('Cold'). Óðinn instigates the migration to the North, leaving his sons as rulers on the way in other parts of Europe, while his son Skjǫldr founds the dynasty of Skjǫldungar in Denmark. Óðinn settles in Sigtuna but also colonizes Norway through his son Nóregr. The notion of the *æsir* bringing good fortune and gaining easy power in the North is established here as well as in *Ynglinga saga*, but while the annalistic presentation is extensive in *Ynglinga saga* — which introduces an historical work — the ambition of the Prologue is to give a short background and frame of reference to the indigenous myths related to Gylfi in *Gylfaginning*.

The Learned Prehistory thus connects characters and nations to an eminent ancestry of great characters from classical tradition. In that sense, Learned Prehistory is not necessarily euhemeristic, but in the Old Norse version the names of gods are an integrated part of it. Insofar as pre-Christian mythology is explained in terms of noble men who through their great feats came to be considered as gods, Learned Prehistory thus intertwines with euhemerism and the desire to establish an historical past blends with the ambition to explain how pre-Christian religion and mythology came into being. In the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, this euhemeristic Prehistory is tightly connected to the idea of a natural religion. The explanation of how myths have appeared as the expressions of unenlightened, pre-Christian peoples who came to understand nature and the world through their five senses as ruled by some kind of divine power is the first stage of the Prologue's explanation of pre-Christian religion, and it is immediately followed by the second stage: the euhemeristic explanation and Learned Prehistory. So, the Prologue presents two consistent explanations for the existence of pre-Christian religions in Scandinavia and the world.

As an extension of *Snorra Edda*'s connection of history and myth with poetry, Snorri's nephew Óláfr Þórðarson a generation later in *The Third Grammatical Treatise* not only applied Latin rhetorical learning to Icelandic

ably shorter and the Codex Wormianus (W) considerably longer. W adds biblical information that does not really concern the Prehistory but is relevant to the Babel theory of diffusion of the world's languages and religions. See Chapter 2.1.2 below.

poetry, but also argued for the connection of the two languages and literatures by putting Old Norse poetry on a par with the Latin poets: *ǫll er ein listin, skáldskapr sá, er rómverskir spekingar námu i Athenisborg á Grikklandi ok sneru síðan í latinumál, ok sá ljóðaháttr eða skáldskapr er Óðinn ok aðrir Asíamenn fluttu norðr hingat í norðr hálfu heimsins* ('it is the same art: the poetry that Roman sages learned in Athens in Greece and then turned into Latin, and that song verse-form or poetry that Óðinn and other Asian men forwarded up here to the northern part of the world') (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884: 60).

In early research, and indeed up to and including the first part of the twentieth century, learned expositions were viewed as unnatural to a 'naive' and original culture such as the Old Norse was presumed to have been. Passages connected to the Learned Prehistory were thus apt to be considered as later additions and risked being excluded from Old Norse texts by editors and translators. To such editors, translators and readers, the description in *Snorra Edda*'s *Gylfaginning* that connects its mythological narratives directly to Troy, identifying Loki with Ulysses, or the historiographic material of the Prologue, simply appeared to be inauthentic additions by a later scribe. Andreas Heusler, who was the first to elaborate the description of the Learned Prehistory, thus considered these notions not to be Snorri's own (Heusler 1969 [1908]; see e.g. Klingenberg 1993a).

During the twentieth century the intellectual background of Snorri's *Edda* has been continuously explored (Baetke 1950; Dronke and Dronke 1977; Faulkes 1978–79, 1983; Weber 1986; Clunies Ross 1987, 1992; Klingenberg 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1998, 2003). In this line of research, *Snorra Edda* has been interpreted as a unified whole, structured by a theological awareness in which the Learned Prehistory forms a natural part. This view is questioned most diligently by Klaus von See (1998, 1999, 2001), who claims that the discrepancies between the Prologue and the following parts of *Snorra Edda* prove that Snorri cannot have been the author of the Prologue. While it would hardly be expected that a prologue, giving a general background, would go seamlessly with the narrative of *Gylfaginning*, and full consistency is not usually to be found in a medieval author, the question of whether Snorri really authored the Prologue appears fairly uninteresting. The attribution of the *Edda* to Snorri is only found in the Uppsala manuscript, and the attribution of *Heimskringla* has no explicit corroboration (Danielsson 2002: 349–63). Thus, what is clear is that there exist four different versions of what we call *Snorra Edda*, embodying different degrees of learned exposition in the Prologue. What seems certain is that the ambition to explain pre-Christian religion took, as in the Prologue of *Snorra Edda*, an obvious start in the notion of a natural religion (deifications of

natural phenomena) and continued in euhemerism (powerful men being mistaken for gods) (see Lönnroth 1990; Marold 1998). The Learned Prehistory naturally blends with the latter and adds to the taste of 'learnedness' — a taste which may be taken as a natural element for any text developed against the background of Christian learning.

The concept of the migration of the *æsir* from Asia lived on in tradition long after the Middle Ages. Even in Enlightenment authors such as Peter Suhm in Denmark and Olof Dalin in Sweden, the latter known as a modern thinker of his time and a great mocker of patriotic ideas, the idea of one (or several) historical Óðinns and a migration from Asia to Sweden prevailed (Lassen 2011: 32–49, Wallette 2004). In modern scholarship, Omeljan Pritsak has claimed a certain historical background in the Learned Prehistory, but without acclaim (Pritsak 1981; cf. Lindow 1984).

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2.1.2 – The Tower of Babel and the Diffusion of World Languages and Religions

Annette Lassen

In reading Old Norse translations of hagiography, such as *Clemens saga*, or of historiography, such as *Trójumanna saga*, one may find it surprising to encounter Þórr, Freyja, Sif and other Nordic deities beside the Graeco-Roman gods or the heroes at Troy. Contrary to modern practice, when medieval Old Norse translators encountered Graeco-Roman gods in their Latin texts, they rendered them with the names of Nordic deities — and, occasionally, the reverse also happens, in Latin works from Adam of Bremen onwards, when references are made to Nordic gods (Lassen 2011: 92–95). The use of the Nordic pantheon in translations in fact constitutes the earliest reception of the Old Norse gods as transmitted in manuscripts.[1] The oldest among these trans-

[1] The most ancient fragments containing such translations are Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 655 IX 4to (*c.* 1150–1200) with fragments of *Matheus saga*, *Plácidus saga* and *Blasíus saga*, Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 674 a 4to (*c.* 1150–1200), containing a translation of *Elucidarius*. The fragment, Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 655 III 4to (*c.* 1200) contains a part of *Nikulás saga erkibyskups*, and Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 645 4to (*c.* 1220–1250) contains sagas of the apostles, among others *Clemens saga*.

Annette Lassen is Associate Professor at the Arnamagnæan Institute in the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics (Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab) at the University of Copenhagen. Her research focuses on Old Norse literature and mythology and their reception. Her publications include *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi* (2003), *Odin på kristent pergament* (2011), *Islændingesagaernes verden* (2017) and the edition *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* (2011).

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lations are the hagiographical texts, some of which are believed to date back to the eleventh century (Sverrir Tómasson 1992: 425; Cormack 2000: 302). They are preserved in some of the earliest manuscripts we possess, from the second half of the twelfth century. We also encounter medieval renderings of names of divinities in the Germanic translations of the planetary days of the week — where 'Mars' is equated with 'Týr', 'Mercury' rendered as 'Óðinn', 'Jove' becomes 'Þórr' and 'Venus' 'Freyja'. Days of the week would seem to provide a fixed set of references for such translations, but there is no consistency discernible throughout. It has, consequently, proved difficult to find a pattern in how Graeco-Roman deities were substituted with Nordic gods in translations (cf. Tveitane 1985, Hofmann 1997, Battista 2003). We should keep in mind that the vast majority of these texts were produced by people with little or no interest in pagan gods (Lassen 2011: 107–09). On the contrary, most such translations were likely to have been made by clerics and monks, who might well have wished to flaunt their (holy) indifference to such matters.

Babel and the Fallacy of (Other) Religions

However, the replacement of the Graeco-Romans gods with the Nordic gods is not likely to have been thoughtless — a simple act of exchanging arbitrary linguistic labels. Even the names of Latinized Greek divinities did not pose a linguistic challenge to the translator, since he had the option of employing the Latin case endings unchanged, a practice not infrequent in Old Norse texts. Indeed, we have evidence to support the idea that underlying this manner of translation was something more significant, namely, the theory of biblical history concerning the diffusion of all the world's languages and religions.

Until the first decades of the nineteenth century, when comparative philology made the breakthrough to modern linguistics in Denmark and Germany (see Chapter 7.1 below), the myth of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11.1–9) had served pious Christian scholars as a theoretical model to explain the emergence of different languages, and provided as well a theological explanation for the origin of idolatry. According to a widespread and early interpretation of the Book of Genesis, mankind originally spoke a single language and believed in a single Creator. Good Christians, such as the *discipulus* ('pupil') of the popular medieval religious handbook entitled *Elucidarius*, to which we will turn below, might therefore naturally express puzzlement at the supererogatory evolution of paganism. According to the myth of the Tower of Babel, God had come down heavily on mankind in Shinar, when it began building a city with a tower reaching all the way into heaven, by confusing peoples' common language and

scattering them all over the earth. The miraculous, inexplicable crunching of the primal language (which was often assumed to have been Hebrew, although the Bible never reveals as much) into a multitude of languages (commonly believed to be seventy-two) also came to form the basis of an explanation of idolatry, since the splintering of the universal *ur*-language was, rationally enough, considered to have caused manifold misunderstandings of the true belief in God the creator, which later evolved into as many systems of disbelief or idolatry. As it was formulated: *item dixit, quod sicut sunt LXXII lingue, ita sunt LXXII fides* — when there are seventy-two languages, there must also be seventy-two religions (Borst 1957: 3).[2]

Admittedly, early Christians, whose proselytizing ambitions often extended beyond linguistic boundaries, seem to have nourished a hope that the debilitating human condition resulting from the punishment meted out by God at the Tower of Babel, that is, the lack of mutual intelligibility general among users of world languages, which in the past had led to so much religious confusion, could miraculously be overcome. In the New Testament, the story of the Pentecost miracle forms a sort of redemption from the sin of effrontery committed by mankind at Babel, or at least a momentary lifting of the divine curse of miscommunication between the nations of the world. After the crucifixion, the resurrected Christ had instructed his disciples to spread the glad tidings to each and every nation. However, since the plurality of world languages posed an obstacle to the evangelical project, a solution was provided, according to the Acts of the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were gathered together. Suddenly, they heard a noise and a wind from heaven blew into the house. They envisioned tongues of fire that separated and rested on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began miraculously to speak in other languages. The people of Jerusalem suddenly understood the other languages as if they were their own (Acts 2. 1–13).

Notwithstanding the exception of the Pentecost, and the fact that such Church Fathers as Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius and Augustine of Hippo chose rather to rely on other explanations than the confusion of languages to account for the rise of paganism, in Christian theology the Babel myth was widely associated with the rise of idolatry. From there it entered Old Norse vernacular texts, as for instance Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. One theological treatise,

[2] The number of languages originates with the legend of the earliest translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. According to the legend, there were seventy-two translators, six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

referred to earlier, which unambiguously associates Babel with the rise of paganism, is the *Elucidarius*, written around 1100 by Honorius Augustodunensis (1080–1154). The once very popular *Elucidarius* is a handbook for explaining theological conundrums, and it is structured as a dialogue between a pupil (*discipulus*) and his teacher (*magister*). It was early on translated into many languages, Old Icelandic among them.[3] Naturally, the perversion of idolatry is among those subjects needing explanation in the *Elucidarius* — under the heading *Her segir huaðan blot skur goða hofust* ('here it is said from where the worship of idols originated'):

> Discipulus: Ef allir gǫfguðu einn guð fyrst í upphafi hvaðan hófusk blót skurðgoða?
>
> Magister: Risar gerðu stǫpul þann er Babel var kallaðr [...]. Í þeim stað var fyrstr konungr Nembroth. Þar hafði síðan veldi Ninus. Hann lét gera líkneskju eftir feðr sínum dauðum en hann hét Belus, ok bauð hann allri þjóð ríkiss síns at gǫfga líkneskit. En þar námu aðrir eftir ok gerðu líkneski eftir ástvinum sínum eða eftir hinum ríkustu konungum dauðum ok buðu lýðinum at blóta þá svá sem Romaborgarmenn Romulum, Kritarmenn Þór eða Óðin. Hrælza jók í ǫllum heimi hǫldum drottna fjǫlda. En djǫflar gengu inn í líkneskin ok tældu lýðinn í svǫrum sínum.
>
> (*Discipulus*: If everybody at the beginning worshipped one god, how did the worship of idols arise?
>
> *Magister*: The giants built the tower which was called Babel [...]. In this place, the first king was Nembroth. Then Ninus reigned. He had a statue of his deceased father, who was called Belus, made and he ordered everybody in his kingdom to worship the statue. Others imitated him and made statues of their favourites or of the mightiest of kings, when they were deceased, and they ordered the people to sacrifice to them, as the Romans did to Romulus, the Cretans to Þórr or Óðinn. Terror increased the number of their lords for men everywhere in the world. But demons entered the statues and deceived the people in their oracular responses.) (Firchow and Grimstad 1989: 111–12)

According to the *Elucidarius*, idolatry first arose in the city of Babylon, where the Tower of Babel was under construction, shortly after God frustrated this overambitious building project. Honorius Augustodunensis, however, does not explain how the two events are connected or why idolatry emerged exactly in Babylon. A more detailed description of *how* the building of the Tower of Babel

[3] The Old Norse translation exists in different manuscripts. The oldest one is a fragment, AM 675 a 4to, from the second half of the twelfth century.

resulted in pagan misunderstandings and subsequently pagan religions is found in an Old Norse translation, *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst* ('On the Origin of Lack of Correct Faith'), of a sermon by Ælfric (*c*. 955–*c*. 1010) in Anglo-Saxon rhythmic prose, *De falsis Deis* ('Concerning False Gods'). Ælfric's sermon is based in turn on a Latin sermon by Martinus Bracarensis (Martin of Braga, *c*. 515–79), *De correctione rusticorum* ('Concerning the Correction of Rustics') written around 550 for the purpose of enlightening peasants and inducing them to firmly reject paganism (see also Chapter 1.2). Interestingly, Martinus Bracarensis does not mention Babel, but Ælfric found it natural to introduce Babel into this context.[4] The Old Norse translator did not have Martinus's Latin text at hand and seems only to have used Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon text (Taylor 1969: 102; Kirby 1973: 28). *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst* is preserved in a single manuscript, Hauksbók (Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 544 4to, *c*. 1300; Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónnson 1892–96: 156–64).[5] Here we read:

> þeir tóku til ok létu gera stǫpul ór grjóti svá háfan at þeir vildu með því koma í himinríki. En þá sá dróttinn mikilæti þeira ok kom þar sjalfr er þeir váru er þá gerning skyldu gera ok villti svá fyrir þeim at engi vissi hvat annarr sagði eða gerði. En þeir menn váru .ij. oc lxx. En þeir menn allir er þar váro urðu svá ósáttir at hverr þeira fór á síns vegar. En sú gerning fell ǫll niðr. Þá fóru þeir til ýmissa landa. En mannkyni óx þá ǫfund ok varð svikit af hinum sama djǫfli er Adam sveik fyrr, svá at þeir gerðu sér guð ok sáu eigi skynsemðaraugum á várn dróttinn er þá skóp. Sumir blótuðu sól, sumir mána, sumir stjǫrnur, sumir eld, sumir vatn, sumir jǫrð. Fyrir því blótuðu þeir hana at þar fœðisk hvatvetna við hana, fyrir því vatn at allt myndi deyja ef þat væri eigi, fyrir því eld at hann er varmr við at sitja, en af því sól ok ǫll himintungl at þaðan kemr ljós allt í heim þenna. En þeir máttu þat eigi vita ef þeir vildi at því hyggja at sá er einn guð er þat allt skóp mǫnnum til hjalpar. Enda fengu þeir enn meiri villudóm ok blótuðu menn þá er ríkir ok rammir váru í þessum heimi síðan er þeir váru dauðir ok hugðu þat at þeir myndu orka jafn miklu dauðir sem þá er þeir váro kvikir. Maðr var sá einn mjǫk ríkr ok bjó í ey nǫkurri er hét Saturnus. […] hann drap sonu sína alla hvern sem borinn var […] Einn lét hann lifa en sá hét Iupiter […]. Þá hina meinfullu menn ok hina fúlu hǫfðu þeir þá at bestum guðum sér. En sá Iupiter var þeira allra ríkastr hinna heiðnu manna, er sumir menn kalla Þór. En sá er allr einn […][6]

[4] Martinus Bracarensis's sermon was also translated by another Anglo-Saxon homilist, Wulfstan (d. 1023), who likewise made the link between the confusion of languages and paganism.

[5] The origin of idolatry in the reign of Ninus, the second king of Babylon, is also mentioned by another influential theologian, Peter Comestor (d. 1178), in his *Historia scholastica* (chaps xxxiix–xl).

[6] The passage in Ælfric's *De falsis Deis* is less elaborate and less verbose than the Old Norse

> (They began to have a tower of stone constructed, so tall that it would enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven. But then the Lord saw their insolence, and he himself came to where they had planned to carry out this deed, and he confused them so that no one knew what the other said or did. And these men were seventy-two. Therefore there are many languages in the world. And all the men, who were gathered there, differed so much that each went his own way. And the work was dropped entirely. Then they went to different countries, and envy grew among mankind and thus it was deceived by the same devil who had before betrayed Adam. And thus they created a god for themselves, and looked with eyes deprived of comprehension upon our Lord, who created them. Some sacrificed to the sun, some to the moon, some to the stars, some to fire, some to water, some to earth. They worshipped her, because everything is nourished by her, water because everything would die without it, fire because it is warm to sit by, and the sun and all the heavenly planets because from them all light comes into this world. But they could not figure out, if they had given it a thought, that there is one God, who created all of this for the benefit of man. Hence their erroneous religion evolved even further, and they began worshipping, once dead, those men who had been rulers and strong in this world, thinking that they could achieve just as much dead as when alive. There was a most powerful man, who lived on a certain island, his name was Saturnus. [...] he killed all of his sons, each one as he was born [...]. He let one live, his name was Jupiter [...]. Those blameful and foul men, they held them to be the best of gods. Jupiter was by far the mightiest of the pagans, although some men call him Þórr. But he is one and the same [...].) (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96: 157–58).

After the confusion of languages, we are told, the people were dispersed throughout the world, where they were deceived by the devil, so that they could no longer sense or comprehend (*sáu eigi skynsemðaraugum*) the one and only God who had created them. As a consequence, they confused creation with the Creator and worshipped the sun, water and many other things, not realizing that all of this had been made by God to aid them in living their lives. This is the beginning of idolatry. But the disbelief grew even worse, when mankind began to worship deceased human beings, who had been powerful when they were still alive. At this juncture in the homily, Saturn and Jove are introduced, while it is pointed out to the readers or listeners that some call this same figure Þórr, and that the two, Jove and Þórr, are identical (*sá er allr einn*). In this way,

translation. Ælfric nonetheless informs his audience that there is no evidence of idolatry from before the Flood until after the building of the Tower of Babel, when the devil deceived mankind; it is further said, when Jove has been introduced, that 'he is called Þórr by other people' (Ælfric, *Homilies*: 72–81, 124; cf. further discussion in Chapter 1.2 above).

gods from different pagan religions, like the Graeco-Roman and the Nordic gods, are considered to be identical and have the same origin. They are simply two local variants of the same basic misunderstanding.

The Latin original behind *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst* has been pointed out as one of the possible sources of the Prologue of Snorri's *Edda* (cf. the discussion in Dronke and Dronke 1977: 154–58). Here, Snorri may have become acquainted with the concept of the origin of paganism as a result of the confusion of languages. The explanation of the error of idolatry in the Prologue of Snorri's *Edda*, that pagans only possessed *jarðlig skilning* ('earthly understanding') in contrast with the *andlig spekð* ('spiritual wisdom') which Christians were granted by divine grace, echoes the theology of *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst*, where it is stated that post-Babelian man 'looked with eyes deprived of comprehension' upon the true Lord, who had created him.

Snorri's *Edda* is transmitted, as is well known, in three different redactions (in Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute, MS GKS 2367 4to [to which redaction the fragment in Codex Trajectinus, Utrecht 1374, also belongs]; Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, MS DG 11; and Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, Codex Wormianus, MS AM 242 fol.). For the present purpose the otherwise interesting question of Snorri's original text is of little importance, since we are only interested here in ascertaining prevalent ideas in medieval Iceland. In that connection, the Codex Wormianus redaction is of considerable importance, since here the association of the confusion of languages with the origin of paganism is explicitly formulated. The affinity between Snorri's *Edda* and *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst* is most evident in the Prologue to the *Edda* in the Codex Wormianus (*c.* 1350). This version of Snorri's Prologue contains more detail, including learned interpolations. It is traditionally believed to be further removed from Snorri's original than the other redactions of the *Edda*. The classical influence is quite explicit in the Codex Wormianus (Faulkes 1978–79: 108), which is believed to have been written at the Þingeyrar monastery (Johansson 1997: 225–27, 240). Apart from Snorri's *Edda*, it also contains *Rígsþula* and four *Grammatical Treatises*, which is one of the reasons why it has been suggested that it was a schoolbook (Guðrún Nordal 2001: 55, 68).

After describing the destruction of the tower, the compiler of Codex Wormianus informs the reader that Zoroastres was the name of the leader of the tower builders. He continues:

> En forsmiðir váru ij. ok lxx. Ok svá margar tungur hafa síðan dreifsk um verǫldina eptir því sem risarnir skiptusk síðan til landa ok þjóðirnar fjǫlguðusk. Í þessum

> sama stað var hin ágætasta borg ok dregit af nafni stǫpulsins ok kǫlluð Babilon ok sem tungnaskiptið var orðit þá fjǫlguðusk svá nǫfnin mannanna ok annarra hluta. Ok sjá sami Zoroastres hafði mǫrg nǫfn. [... Hann] lét taka sik til konungs. [...] Af honum hófsk skurðgoðavilla. [...] En sem nǫfnin fjǫlguðusk þá týndisk með því sannleikrinn. Ok af fyrstu villu þá blótaði hverr maðr eptirkomandi sinn formeistara dýr eða fugla, loptin ok himintunglin ok ýmisliga dauðliga hluti þar til er þessi villa gekk um allan heim ok svá vandliga týndu þeir sannleiknum at eingi vissi skapara sinn utan þeir einir menn sem tǫluðu ebreska tungu, þá sem gekk fyrir stǫpulsmíðina [...]. Ok því skilðu þeir alla hluti jarðligri skilningu at þeim var eigi gefin andlig spekðin.
>
> (There were seventy-two leading craftsmen. And as many tongues have since dispersed throughout the world, in accordance with how the giants were then distributed to the countries and the peoples multiplied. In the same place there was a most famous city, named after the tower and called Babylon. And after the division of tongues had come about, the names of men were also multiplied and those of other things. And this same Zoroastres had many names. [... He] had himself declared king. [...] It is from him that idolatry originated. [...] And when the appellations multiplied, thereby truth perished. And from the first error, every successor worshipped his previous master, or animals or birds, or the air, the planets and various inanimate things, until this fallacy became current throughout the world, and so completely did they forgo the truth that no one knew his creator except those men alone, who spoke the Hebrew tongue, which was current before the tower construction [...]. And thus they understood everything with an earthly understanding, because they had not been granted spiritual wisdom.) (Finnur Jónsson 1924: 3)

Just as was the case in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst*, the emergence of paganism or idolatry is associated with what happened in connection with the building of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent confusion of languages,[7] but here the decline is more elaborated: after the confusion of languages, 'the names of men were also multiplied and those of other things', and with the increase in names, truth perished and people forgot their knowledge of God. Only people speaking the original tongue, Hebrew, did not forgo this knowledge, their comprehension of truth or spiritual wisdom. After this description, the compiler of Codex Wormianus tells about Saturn, Jove and the Trojans. Here we find more enlightening passages:

[7] According to Faulkes (1983: 293), *Veraldar saga* is a source for this passage of Codex Wormianus, but in *Veraldar saga* (Jakob Benediktsson 1944: 42–43) it is only stated that the cradle of idolatry is Babylon, as is also the case in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (Lindsay 1911 [1957]: VIII, xi, 23).

> þá er Pompeius einn hǫfðingi Rómverja herjaði í austrhálfuna flýði utan Óðinn ór Asía ok hingat í norðrhálfuna ok þá gaf hann sér ok sínum mǫnnum þeira nǫfn ok kallaði Priamum hafa heitið Óðinn en drottning hans Frigg [...] ok hvárt er Óðinn sagði þat til metnaðar við sik eða þat hafi svá verit með skipti tungnanna þá hafa þá margir frœðimenn haft þat fyrir sannendasǫgn [...]
>
> (when Pompey, one of the Roman generals, harried in the eastern part of the world, Óðinn fled from Asia to here, the northern part, and at that point he gave himself and his men their names, and claimed that Priam was called Óðinn and his queen Frigg [...] and whether or not Óðinn said this out of pride, or because it had come about with the division of tongues, many scholars have held it to be a true story [...].) (Finnur Jónsson 1924: 6).

The compiler does not rule out the possibility that Óðinn was practising deception, that is, that he just pretended to be Priamus for his own advancement, but he equally promotes the other explanation that the variation in names for the same historical person is a result of what happened at Babel. In any case, he says, many learned men have considered it a fact that different names can apply to identical historical persons. He then continues to mention other heroes, descended from Troy, both listing their names in a foreign language and *er vér kǫllum* ('what we call him [or her]') in Icelandic. In the epilogue to Snorri's *Edda* in *Skáldskaparmál*, the discussion about the use of alternative names for Trojan heroes is resumed. Here it is made clear that the writer does not consider the alternation of heroic and divine names to be an innocent act of confusion. It is part of the misunderstanding of naïve pagans. The writer warns his readers against believing that there is any truth value to the stories about the Æsir:

> En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin guð ok eigi á sannendi þessa sagna annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfolkit villtisk frá réttri trú. Ok þá næst frá Tyrkjum hvernveg Asíamenn, þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir, fǫlsuðu frásagnir fra þeim tíðendum er gjǫrðusk í Tróju til þess at landfolkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera.
>
> [...] Sá salr [...] er Æsir kǫlluðu Brimis sal [...] þat var hǫll Priamus konungs. [...] Ragnarǫkkr þat er Trójumanna orrosta [...] Pirrus honum jǫfnuðu þeir til Fenrisulfs [...] Þat kalla þeir Surta loga er Trója brann [...]
>
> (But Christians should not believe in pagan gods, nor in the truth of these stories, except in the sense expressed at the beginning of this book, where it is told what happened when mankind lost its way from the true religion; and the same applies to the Turks — how the Asians, those who were called *Æsir*, fabricated stories about what happened at Troy, so that the country people would think they were gods.

> [...] The hall [...] which the Æsir called Brimir's hall [...] that was King Priam's castle. [...] Ragnarǫkkr, that is, the Trojan war [...] Pirrus, him they identified as the wolf Fenrir [...]. They call it the fires of Surtr when Troy burned.) (Finnur Jónsson 1924: 55–56).

The matching of heroes' and gods' names from diverse languages and geographical regions is seen as a natural consequence of the confusion of languages. According to Snorri, the Asians were full of fraud and deception, when they tricked the naïve Swedish king Gylfi into believing their words, and when Óðinn identified himself with Priam of Troy, it was his great ambition speaking.

There is a polemical twist to this theory of the consequences of the confusion of languages. The theory underlying the translation of Nordic gods by Graeco-Roman gods professes that the different pagan pantheons were just local variants and misunderstandings of the same original belief — which is basically a sympathetic and unpolemical attitude to pagans, who cannot help being pagans. But the theory is seldom entirely unpolemical insofar as there is always an evil agent, such as Óðinn or Zoroastres, who promotes idolatry and paganism with his deceptions.

The Babelian Consequences in Practice

Apart from Snorri's *Edda* itself, *Trójumanna saga* provides us with an example of how the theory was applied in practice, and of how the Graeco-Roman and the Nordic pantheons could function together. *Trójumanna saga* is a translation of Latin sources (Louis-Jensen 1974: 651). In *Trójumanna saga*, several, but not all, of the Roman deities' names are translated, which implies that the two pantheons are considered to be a single system. Jove is almost always translated by 'Þórr', and the mother of Achilles is called 'Sif'. Similarly, we encounter Freyja but never Venus. In the Old Norse translation we accordingly read that Sif goes to Jove for help, and when Menelaus and Paris are fighting, Freyja intervenes to rescue the latter (*Trójumanna saga* [S], Louis-Jensen 1963: 86–88, 123). The translation of deities' names in *Trójumanna saga* reflects the medieval tendency to integrate Nordic or Germanic history into the Roman one by claiming that they are of the same origin and spring from the same original religion and history. Accordingly, it is unproblematic to translate the Roman gods by their Nordic counterparts, as they are effectively the same, as it is explicitly stated in *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst*.[8]

[8] Cf. also the Benedictine monk Remigius Autissiodorensis (*c.* 841–908), in a treatise on

In the Old Norse translations, however, we encounter a great variety of solutions to problems of translation, meant to dissolve the incongruity between the pantheons. Óðinn is used as a translation for all the major Roman deities, Mercury, Mars, Jove, Hercules and Saturn, while Þórr is used as a translation of Jove and Hercules (Battista 2003: 193). The many different translations indicate that it may not have been as simple a task in practice as in theory to transfer these figures from one pantheon to another. The different choices and solutions can be confusing, when deities' names are transferred from one language to another, but they are not necessarily a sign that the Old Norse translators no longer had a clear idea of the functions and significances of the different Old Norse gods, or, conversely, that the translators lacked knowledge of the Roman pantheon, or even that the translators arbitrarily picked a divine equivalent felt to correspond most closely to the incidental function of a Roman deity in a specific text (cf. Battista 2003: 193–94). The incongruity between the pantheons is never addressed explicitly in the Norse translations or, for that matter, in *The Grammatical Treatises* or Snorri's *Edda*.[9] Even though Old Norse translators may have been aware of it, they nonetheless silently transferred the gods' names from one pantheon to the other. This is probably because they did not consider the lack of congruity to be a problem. Hagiographical translations were, we should remember, produced in order to promote Christianity, and not to provide representations of pagan gods in a manner faithful to the history of paganism. The use of Nordic gods in translations of Roman gods, therefore, reveals more about the Christian textual milieux in the Middle Ages than about the functions or characteristics of Nordic gods in pagan times. According to learned medieval Christians, both Graeco-Roman and Nordic gods were nothing but parallel pagan misunderstandings, originating in the primeval language confusion. Once people had lost the original tongue, they lost their sense of reason, and subsequently their true and original faith in God. When this had happened, people were defenceless against religious deception — just as King Gylfi is in Snorri's *Edda*. Thus, medieval Christians would not have expected to find religious enlightenment in tales such as those we collect

the Graeco-Roman gods: 'The Stoics say there is only one god and goddess, alike in power, and by reason of their offices and acts they are called by various names. It is the same god who is called now Sol, now Liber, now Apollo, the same goddess who is called now Luna, now Diana, now Ceres, now Juno, now Proserpina' (cited in Dronke and Dronke 1977: 166).

[9] In contrast, Saxo comments in his *Gesta Danorum* that the Graeco-Roman and the Nordic pantheons do not match, and that Þórr, therefore, cannot be identified with Jove, and similarly, that Óðinn cannot be identified with Mercury (*Saxo* 2015: I, vi. 5. 4, pp. 380–81).

under the label of mythology — for them these were only muddled misunderstandings. Even though a discerning and well-schooled Christian could with great effort glimpse the underlying biblical truths, albeit hopelessly confused after the loss of a paradisiacal linguistic matrix, such tales were indelibly stained with idolatry and the bloody sins of ancient giants.

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2.1.3 – Demonism and the Pre-Christian Gods of Scandinavia

Margaret Clunies Ross

The key to understanding the standard medieval view of the history of Scandinavian religions within the context of the general Christian view of world history is the concept of what was called in Old Norse *siðaskipti*, literally 'change of customs', a term for the period of change between the old, pre-Christian religion with its attendant customs (*inn forni siðr*, 'the old custom') and the new religion of Christianity (*inn nýi siðr*, 'the new custom') with its particular beliefs and practices. Although indigenous ideas and beliefs played their part in Old Icelandic representations of the pre-Christian past in saga literature (see Chapter 2.1.4 by Ármann Jakobsson below), the medieval Icelandic world-view was largely based upon the ideology of the Christian Church on the subjects of world history and the place of non-Christian religions within that history. Even though the medieval Church in Iceland may have taken a good century or more to confirm its position after the conversion moment *c*. 1000, there is plenty of evidence that Christian ideology, Christian books and Christian practices were well established in Iceland by the time of

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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the presumed beginnings of vernacular writing in the twelfth century. By this time, therefore, we can assume that the Icelandic world-view combined traditional knowledge and attitudes with those attributable to mainstream medieval Christianity.

The Christian concept of time depended upon a conviction that 'time existed only between the Creation and the Last Things' (Smalley 1974: 28). Christians divided history into several time-bands that corresponded to the major events recorded in the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible, which ended with the Last Judgement. According to St Augustine (d. 430), there were six ages of the world and a seventh, ushered in by the Last Judgement, which marked the transition from chronological time to eternity. Early medieval historians like Eusebius (d. *c*. 341) and Orosius (d. *c*. 418) created narratives that gave room for the historiography of human societies outside the orbit of Christendom, though the histories of such groups were largely significant in the eyes of these writers because they came into contact with Christians and either resisted Christianity or converted to it. Nevertheless, with the model of Orosius's *Historiae adversum paganos* ('Histories against the Pagans'), a kind of world history that took account of the presence of non-Christian societies came into existence and could be used by later medieval writers as a basis for narratives of the lives and beliefs of peoples in pagan times.

A great deal has now been written about how medieval Scandinavian writers accommodated texts representing pre-Christian Nordic societies within Christian accounts of the history of the last, sixth age of the world, which began after the birth of Christ and was to end at the eschatological millennium. A number of these accommodations asserted that the pre-Christian dynasties and other ruling families of Scandinavia could trace their ancestry either to euhemerized versions of the old pagan gods, to figures from the Book of Genesis or to ancestral tribes or heroes known from classical literature, particularly from the story of the fall of Troy, as discussed by Mats Malm in Chapter 2.1.1 above. Other strategies were of a typological nature, and implicitly argued that the events of the pre-Christian past could be paralleled with the events of Christian history (Weber 1987). Still others focused on the period of conversion or *siðaskipti*, when the tyrannical rule of demons and other devilish forces in Scandinavia was brought to an end by the power of Christianity and its agents (Weber 1986). This chapter describes how the pre-Christian religions of the North were often accounted for in terms of demonism, that is, the belief that the old pagan gods were in fact demons and that pagan religions were not true religions at all but rather the worship of demons, whose magical powers and abilities to deceive humans into believing that they were gods was the basis of their cults.

Much Old Norse literature is set in the past, whether the recent past, during the conversion period or in prehistoric times. Many of the events of this literature were therefore presumed to have occurred during the time that Scandinavia was still pagan. The Christian writers of such narratives imagined the societies they were writing about as beset by paranormal beings and events that occurred before the powers of Christendom could eradicate the dangerous illusions and manifestations of Satan and other demons. Such ideas form the conceptual background to a great deal of Old Norse literature, although the concepts themselves are not always explained overtly. Frequently, however, they inform the narratives and would have been understood by medieval Christians to provide an explanation for the superficially strange and inexplicable behaviour attributed to people living in pre-Christian times. Several examples from Old Norse texts will demonstrate the pervasiveness of the demonic approach to the pre-Christian religions of the North, an approach that was orthodox and commonplace throughout medieval Europe.

There are a number of Old Norse sagas and *þættir* ('short tales') about the evangelizing journeys into the pagan Norwegian backwoods undertaken by the Norwegian missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason (r. *c.* 995–*c.* 1000) and Óláfr inn helgi 'The Saint' Haraldsson (r. *c.* 1015–30). According to these sources, the kings often encounter hostile beings and their sorcery in these remote places. The beings are either explicitly or implicitly interpreted as demonic and capable of creating illusions of pagan deities and their powers as well as various kinds of magical effects. Such representations conform to the second of the two kinds of magic, natural and demonic, recognised by medieval thinkers: 'Natural magic was not distinct from science, but rather a branch of science. It was the science that dealt with "occult virtues" (or hidden powers) within nature. Demonic magic was not distinct from religion, but rather a perversion of religion. It was religion that turned away from God and toward demons for their help in human affairs' (Kieckhefer 1990: 9).

Oddr Snorrason was an Icelandic monk of Þingeyrar monastery who composed a saga (*c.* 1180–1200) about the life of the Norwegian evangelist king Óláfr Tryggvason. It was originally written in Latin but was later translated into Old Norse. Oddr's saga has the king encounter and rout the pagan deities Óðinn and Þórr, apparently in the guise of ordinary humans, though with give-away attributes of the old gods, the former as a one-eyed old man, the latter a red-bearded man who boasts of his prowess in killing giantesses. Oddr's narrative makes his Christian perspective on the old Nordic deities quite clear. At the beginning of one tale of the king's encounter with a demon bearing the attributes of the Norse god Óðinn, he writes:

> Now the devil, the enemy of all mankind and always the antagonist of human nature, saw how his power began to be wasted. He saw how greatly God's law was strengthened and increased, and he began to envy this very much. He assumed human disguise that he might betray mankind all the more easily, revealing himself in the guise of an ordinary man. (Andersson 2003: 92; Finnur Jónsson 1932: 131)

The story told after this introduction describes how King Óláfr was being entertained at a feast at Ögvaldsnes, at the time when, in the Christian world, Christ was born, signalling the beginning of the end for Satan and indicating that, in the eyes of the narrator, events in Scandinavia were inextricably linked to events in the Christian world. An old, one-eyed man enters the hall, a very loquacious and knowledgeable man who has a broad hood over his head. The audience of this story would have recognized all these attributes as traditionally belonging to the Norse god Óðinn, but it takes King Óláfr a while longer to recognize him. It is not until he discovers that the chief cook of the household has been tempted by the old man into cooking some fat ox-meat for the king's consumption that he realizes that he had almost been tricked into eating pagan sacrificial food and thus to sin in the eyes of the Church. He tells the cook to throw the meat into the sea and announces that the strange devil of a guest had the look of Óðinn. In this narrative the king understands the old man, who masquerades as Óðinn, as a manifestation of the Christian devil, who has used magical deceptions to try to trick him into apostasy.

Another narrative, again set in the reign of King Óláfr Tryggvason, also turns on the idea that the Christian devil assumes the form of the pre-Christian Norse gods and deludes unenlightened Scandinavians into believing that these gods are animate beings who require the performance of sacrifice and other cultic rites. This is the story of an Icelander, Gunnarr helmingr 'Half', told in a short tale usually called *Qgmundar þáttr dytts ok Gunnars helmings* ('The Short Tale of Qgmundr dytt and Gunnarr helmingr') (*ÍF* IX: 99–115; McKinnell 1987: 132–44; cf. Clunies Ross 2003: 281). The story has a somewhat comical character but a serious message. It describes how Gunnarr helmingr flees from Norway to Sweden, because he has been falsely implicated in the killing of a man there, and takes refuge with a young and beautiful woman described as the priestess or wife of the god Freyr, who is represented in a sanctuary by a wooden icon (*skurðgoð*, 'a carved god'). The local people believe this icon is alive and requires sacrifice (*blót*) from them, and a 'wife' to keep him company. Once a year it is customary in this part of Sweden for the icon of Freyr to be taken on a tour of the fields in order to assure a good harvest for the coming year. Gunnarr accompanies Freyr and his 'wife' along with local people on this procession, but the cart on which they are travelling gets stuck in the mud during a

storm, and all the locals desert the procession, except for Gunnarr, who ends up fighting with the Freyr image, which has become jealous of him. The fighting is tough and Gunnarr is losing, but, at a moment when he thinks of Christ and King Óláfr, he is suddenly able to overcome the wooden Freyr figure (*tréstokkr*), which he is then able to break apart. For the rest of the winter Gunnarr impersonates the Freyr figure, and later it is seen that the 'wife' is pregnant. An excellent harvest follows and the local people believe that their 'Freyr' is the cause of it. Eventually King Óláfr gets to hear of this and guesses at what has happened.

The story of Gunnarr helmingr has been of interest to many scholars because of its account of pre-Christian fertility rituals associated with the god Freyr, which show some similarities to the Roman historian Tacitus's account of the cult of a female deity, Nerthus (linguistically cognate with the name of the male Norse god Njǫrðr, said to be Freyr's father), in which an image of the goddess is carried in procession round an island once a year (cf. *Germania*, ch. 40, Much 1967: 441, 450–51; Mattingly 1948: 133–34; and Chapter 1.1 above). In the form this narrative assumes in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, however, the story is presented through the eyes of a Christian narrator. It is set in Sweden, a country which, in many Norwegian and Icelandic texts, is represented as deeply pagan (Lönnroth 1996), so an implicit contrast is set up for the audience or reader between pre-Christian Sweden, where people believe in pagan gods and credit them with changes in the weather and the fertility of animals and plants, and Christian Norway, with its evangelist king, along with Iceland, by now also Christian. The fact that Gunnarr is able to deceive the local people into believing that he, as 'Freyr', has brought about a good harvest, is symptomatic of the attitudes of credulous pagans. When the 'Freyr' figure is broken up by a Christian and revealed to be just a lump of wood, this confirms the audience in the view that the Swedes had been led astray by demons exercising their magical illusions upon gullible pagans.

A similar Christian perspective is conveyed by a short narrative recorded in several versions of the saga of the early Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri 'Fair hair' (r. *c*. 860–*c*. 932), who lived before the conversion to Christianity. According to this story, Haraldr was enticed by a Sámi man (he is a dwarf in one version) into a marriage with the man's beautiful daughter Snjófríðr, which caused the king to neglect his royal duties and to mourn over her apparently incorrupt body for three years after her death. In this case, the demonic magic that attracted Haraldr to the woman and kept him under her spell is attributed to the non-Norse Sámi, who had a reputation in Norse sources for various kinds of sorcery (cf. Tolley 2009: 1, 59, 64). This phenomenon could perhaps be attributed to natural rather than demonic magic, but the tenor of the descrip-

tion of this event in *Ágrip* (Driscoll 2008: 4–7, 86–87) and in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* XXVI: 125–27) makes it clear that demonic magic was thought to be the cause, as there is a description of how all kinds of evil creatures, such as vipers, frogs and toads, crawled from Snjófríðr's putrid corpse once the illusion had been broken.

An incident of a different kind, though still attributed to demonic forces, occurs in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* ('The Saga of Grettir Ásmundarson'), a saga about a famous Icelandic outlaw probably composed in its present form in the fourteenth century. The incident takes place at a pivotal point in the narrative of Grettir's ill-fated life: on a visit to Norway, he has tried to help a group of men by carrying fire from an isolated farmhouse in order to warm them, but, in the process, has inadvertently set fire to the house, burning its occupants to death. This incident takes place near where the Norwegian king, Óláfr Haraldsson, is staying in Niðaróss (modern Trondheim). In an attempt to exonerate himself from the serious charge of burning men inside a house, for which he is liable to be outlawed again, Grettir agrees to undergo the ordeal of carrying hot iron in the cathedral before both the king and the bishop. Matters are proceeding well and Grettir is about to undertake the trial, when suddenly a boy (*piltr [...] heldr svipligr* ('a youth [...] with an unpleasant look on his face'; *ÍF* VII: 133; Fox and Pálsson 1974: 85–87) appears before him and starts to insult him, taunting him and calling him *margýgjuson* ('son of a sea-ogress'). Grettir grows very angry and loses control of himself, lashing out at the boy. During the general scrum that follows, the king halts the trial by ordeal and sends Grettir back to Iceland, claiming that the Icelander's ill-luck and lack of patience are too great to permit him to remain in Norway.

The saga narrator provides an interpretative gloss on these events by citing common opinion of their meaning: *en þat ætla menn helzt, at þat hafi verit óhreinn andi, sendr til óheilla Gretti* ('and it is thought most likely that he was an unclean spirit, which had been sent to bring ill luck to Grettir') (*ÍF* VII: 133; Fox and Pálsson 1974: 86). The strange boy is thus a demon, sent to test the hero even within the Christian environment of a cathedral and in the course of a Christian rite. The faults Grettir reveals, of anger, impatience and physical violence, were deadly sins in the medieval Christian view. The fourteenth-century composer of this saga is looking back on a past age, when Christianity in Scandinavia was in its infancy, and imagining Grettir undergoing a ritual that had been widespread in medieval European Christendom in earlier times but had virtually disappeared by 1300 (cf. Bartlett 2008: 27–29). Its object was to call down God's verdict on a man's guilt or innocence by testing whether his body could withstand natural forces: only if the hand that bore the hot iron

healed cleanly within a certain period of time could innocence be proved, and this would be unlikely to happen in normal circumstances. In Grettir's case, he does not even get to the ordeal to discover whether God favoured him or not; the demon intervenes to subvert the trial, thus confirming Grettir's reputation for bad luck and assigning its origin, by implication, to a demon or to Satan himself.

The theory of demonism as an explanation of non-Christian religions was one that did not allow the descendants of pagans to take a very positive view of their ancestors' beliefs and rituals. Although it was by far the most common view of pagan religions adopted by the Western Church in medieval Europe, it occurs in Old Norse texts largely in historical or learned contexts, such as those discussed above. It can, however, be presented within what appear to be traditional narratives like the tale of Gunnarr helmingr or the story of King Haraldr hárfagri and Snjófríðr. However, explanations of pagan religions that involve the concepts of euhemerism and natural religions allowed the historians of past societies that were not Christian to salvage much more of the customs and beliefs of their ancestors by neutralising these religions' theophoric character. Such explanations still limit the extent to which pagan beliefs could be considered religious, but they do not necessarily demonize them. Perhaps that is why medieval Scandinavian mythographers like Snorri Sturluson combined all three approaches and were thus able to commit to vellum far more of the pre-Christian myths of Scandinavia than medieval writers in other parts of Europe.

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2.1.4 – Remnants of Indigenous Beliefs in the Other World in Saga Literature

Ármann Jakobsson

Spurious Sources

The main focus of the prose texts (sagas) written in Iceland and elsewhere in the West Norse region in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was the period of the Christianization of the North (from *c*. 800 to *c*. 1100). Consequently, pre-Christian beliefs figure strongly in many sagas of Icelanders, kings' sagas and in the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) as well, with this latter group purporting to deal with an older period in history (their chronology is extremely vague but their focus is the 'dark age' period of *c*. 400 to *c*. 850), which means that Christianity is present only in hindsight, as a comparative ideology in the minds of authors and audiences.

Even sagas that deal entirely with the Christian period, such as the sagas in the *Sturlunga* collection, may also yield useful clues to how pre-Christian beliefs were received in the first ages after the conversion. Perhaps more surprisingly, translated hagiographical narratives taking place in such southern regions as Italy may also provide us with important data, since it was the custom of the Norse-Icelandic translators of these texts to substitute the names of the Norse gods for the Graeco-Roman pantheon, the Roman goddess Vesta thus often becoming Norse Gefjon and Norse Þórr standing in for Jove himself (Ármann Jakobsson 2009a; see also Chapter 2.1.2 above).

Ármann Jakobsson is Professor of Early Icelandic Literature at the University of Iceland. He is a specialist on the sagas of Icelanders, kings' sagas, legendary sagas and medieval Icelandic literature in general. Among his publications are *Nine Saga Studies* (2013) and *A Sense of Belonging: Morkinskinna and Icelandic Identity c. 1220* (2014).

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There is an ubiquitous issue with these sources: they are not contemporary, and their popularity with modern scholars is largely explained by the fact that there is a lack of contemporary sources for the North in the ninth, tenth and even the eleventh centuries. Thus, for example, what the sagas of Icelanders present us with is not necessarily a true record of the time they depict (from *c*. 870 to *c*. 1030) but rather an extended historical tradition, which was presumably oral in the beginning but increasingly literary from the twelfth century onwards. This tradition is likely to have been fashioned by the individual authors, their patrons and by the *zeitgeist* of the period when they were working and the one just preceding it, into a myth in the wider sense of the word: a narrative meant to shape identities, both individual and collective.

And, given the fact that the recorded sources all come from a fairly recently Christianized society, the 'Christian filter' that the pre-Christian beliefs have passed through before they can be viewed by us must always be kept in mind in the quest for traces of the old faith (cf. Haraldur Bessason 1977; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1990–92; Schjødt 2008: 104). There is certainly a great interest, not always negative, in pre-Christian customs, but these are still by necessity always subject to the more hegemonic truths of the official religion (see, e.g., Viðar Pálsson 2008).

All scholars of paranormal activity in the sagas come up against the fact that the settlement and Christianization period in Icelandic history enjoyed immense popularity with those thirteenth-, fourteenth- and even fifteenth-century historiographers who composed the sagas, while the thirteenth century, often referred to as 'the Sturlung age', was far less popular, and the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, possibly the most important periods for the genesis of the actual literature, were more or less ignored by medieval Icelandic historians interested in secular history.

It is hardly a coincidence either that the Christianization of Iceland figures in almost all sagas of Icelanders, or that Icelanders were also assiduous biographers of King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway (r. 995–1000), whom they credited with the Christianization of most of the West Norse region. Thus his 'longest saga' in *Flateyjarbók* (composed 1387–94) is the lengthiest account we have of the conversion of Iceland. This is a narrative composed almost four centuries after the event itself, and, as many of its thirteenth-century sources have been preserved, one can see how it is a continuation of a long tradition which it frequently reinterprets and turns on its head (Kaplan 2011).

The Christianization narratives in the sagas of Icelanders are as varied as they are many. Some are succinct while others are lengthy. *Laxdæla saga* incorporates the Christianization of Iceland into the heroic-romantic narrative

of Kjartan Óláfsson, who becomes the hostage of King Óláfr Tryggvason in the advent to the events leading up to the Icelandic parliament that accepted Christianity. In the saga, however, it is possible that the hostage-taking is more of an indication of the king's desire to keep Kjartan close to him than an act serving a political or missionary purpose. Furthermore, after returning home Kjartan immediately becomes a Christian superhero by fasting longer than had hitherto been deemed possible.

However, the Christianization narrative in *Brennu-Njáls saga* is coloured by that text's preoccupation with law and society and how country-wide disputes can be peacefully settled by old and wise patriarchs. Just as 'the good ended happily and the bad unhappily' in Miss Prism's fictional three-volume novel 'of more than usually revolting sentimentality' referred to in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde 1899), the positive characters of *Njáls saga* embrace Christianity while the unsympathetic ones reject it, making it even clearer than before to the late thirteenth-century audience whom they are supposed to side with.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, the Christianization narrative is framed by uncanny paranormal encounters in which demons have to be exorcised, drowned men return to glare at the living and the spirit of a cantankerous old bully starts walking yet again only to end up within a possessed homicidal bull.

Thus the preoccupation of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century historiographers with the conversion period is multi-faceted, and the Christianization indeed seems to provide a backdrop for very diverse narratives. The only thing that they have in common, apart from the fact that they add a 'miraculous, mythical and highly enigmatic' element to the narrative (Lönnroth 1999: 122–23), is that the advent of Christianity is seen as a breakthrough moment in the history of Iceland that cannot be ignored (cf. Sørensen 1993: 79–89).

Creatures Great and Small

In the *Óláfs saga in mesta* in *Flateyjarbók* various traditional narratives end up forming a part of a great national epic in which the arrival of Christianity is not only the main accomplishment of a great king but also becomes a battle between heaven and hell, good and evil. Demons turn up in the privy, ghosts are fought and pagans are tortured to death in the fight for the souls of men where the stakes are as high as they can possibly be.

In one of the episodes of this saga, *Þiðranda þáttr ok Þórhalls*, a prophet named Þórhallr, who has previously correctly predicted the coming of the new faith and the death of Þiðrandi Hallsson, the most promising young-

ster from the family of his patron, Síðu-Hallr, a key figure in the myth of the Christianization of Iceland in 1000, lies in his bed and starts smiling. When asked about the reason for his mirth, his reply is: *Af því brosi ek, at margr hóll opnask ok hvert kvikvendi býr sinn bagga, bæði smá ok stór, ok gera fardaga* ('I smile because now every nook opens and every creature great and small is packing and preparing to move') (Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860–68: I, 421).

This fairly mundane and comic image of the various paranormal beings, in this instance not categorized by any specific generic name, packing their bags suggests a great diversity of the paranormal and perhaps also its occult nature, by leaving the creatures untitled and thus uncategorized and unexplained, since naming things often serves as an explanation, even in the supposedly scientific world of the twenty-first century. What is made clear is that Christianity means an end of many things, some of which may not have been altogether negative, and that the previous owners of Iceland, invisible to the average human eye, must leave as a part of this civilizing process.

The creatures referred to in the passage above have often been interpreted by modern scholars as *landvættir* ('land spirits'), a word found in such medieval texts as *Landnámabók*, *Egils saga*, *Heimskringla* and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (*ÍF* I: 330–31; *ÍF* II:171; *ÍF* XXVI: 271; *ÍF* XIV: 231; Mundal 2013: 13–14), or perhaps precursors of the early modern age *huldufólk* ('hidden people') prominent in Icelandic folk-tale collections from the nineteenth century (Jón Árnason 1862–64). One might also wonder if the land spirits are the same beings that are being appeased in the *álfablót* ('sacrifices of elves [or 'for elves']') that are referred to on rare occasions in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas (e.g., *ÍF* XXVII: 137) and, thus, just as the words *álfar* and *huldufólk* became more or less interchangeable in early modern age narratives, there also might not have been a clear separation between *álfar* and *landvættir* in medieval Iceland (see, e.g., Böldl 2005: 154).

Like the medieval *álfar*, of which there exist hardly any descriptions in medieval texts of the North (Ármann Jakobsson 2006; cf. Hall 2007), the land spirits tend to be a fairly nebulous entity, but in *Heimskringla* it is stated that some were large and others small, something echoed in the aforementioned *Flateyjarbók* episode (*ÍF* XXVI: 271). The general assumption in the few cases in which the word appears seems to be that there is an abundance of them in pre-Christian Iceland. Thus pre-Christian Iceland is heavily populated not only by humans but also by paranormal beings with whom the humans have to share their country. That they would sooner or later have to drive these previous settlers away seems indicated by the mention of dragon-heads on the bows of

their ships that perturb the land spirits (*ÍF* XIV: 231; Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1860, I: 249; cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 132–38). Although the prophet's depiction of land spirits packing their bags is in a comic mode there is no doubt that the land spirits themselves were no joke. Much as with the later elves and hidden people, it is sometimes remarked that certain places could not be settled because of peoples' fear of land spirits (*ÍF* I: 333).

The hills mentioned in Þórhallr's remark about the great and small creatures now leaving provide a clue to how the landscape of Iceland was thought to have appropriated the nebulous otherworldly creatures of the land that Christianity was imagined to have more or less driven away. While the sea and the lakes and possibly even those woods that still remained could have served very well as the abode of these beings, it is primarily the hills and mountains which are considered to attract the original inhabitants of the island now being Christianized and civilized (Mayburd 2014).

Even humans whose humanity has been taken away by death or other causes go to the hills. The ancestors of Snorri goði 'the Priest', one of the major figures in the Christianization myth of Iceland, took up their abode after their deaths in the hill of Helgafell on Þórsnes, where they presumably lorded it over the other murky creatures much as they had lorded it over their fellow men during their human lifespan. Their movement from the human and well-known to the paranormal and occult is a reminder of how there is often no clear demarcation between *us* and *them*: some of the great and small creatures that are exorcised by Christianity used to be human. The Other which is being outlawed by the new system has not only its own space but also its own time: it resides not just in the hills but also in the past.

Vampires, Witches and Other Trolls on the Margin

The paranormal beings of Helgafell have an uncanny relationship with Snorri goði and their other descendants, belonging to abandoned pagan customs reflecting the similarly uncanny relationship between the *Æsir* ('gods') and the *jǫtnar* ('giants') of Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth-century version of the pre-Christian mythology in his *Edda*, in which Óðinn himself is half-human and half-giant, and there are various family connections between the new sacred deities and the old and unholy chief antagonists of the new order.

The same uncanny relationship is present in every encounter of a human with an undead being, a *draugr* or an *aptrganga*. While these beings were neatly categorized in the nineteenth century, the medieval concepts were more murky. The word *draugr*, for example, is never used about the infamous Glámr in

Grettis saga (*ÍF* VII: 109–23), who was referred to in 1897 as a vampire by the poet and folklorist Andrew Lang (see Ármann Jakobsson 2009b). Indeed, the medieval ghosts of Iceland are not only more reminiscent of the later Eastern European vampires than their medieval Western European counterparts, in being highly physical and dangerous, but they are also referred to by the same term as other ogres and witches and called *troll*. Thus, in medieval Iceland, the ghost or vampire, the witch and the various mountain ogres tend to blend into a single category of the horrific and the unclean (see, e.g., Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 2011).

The case of Ǫgmundr Eyþjófsbani, the main antagonist in the younger versions of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, is a good example (see, e.g., Arnold 2010). This monstrous character is educated in witchcraft and illusions at an early age. It is noted that the Permians *blótuðu [...] hann, ok tryldu hann svá, at hann var engum mennzkum manni líkr* ('worshipped [...] him and made him so trollish that he became unlike any human being'), and that he should *heldr kallaz andi en maðr* ('rather be called a spirit than a human') (Boer 1888: 126–28). In the beginning he is thus human, but he has undergone some ritual that seems to have transferred him from one world to another. There is no mention of him dying in the process, but we know that he cannot be considered a human any longer, and that he cannot die. He admits that he is inhuman — *nú em ek eigi síðr andi en maðr* ('now I am no less a spirit than a man') — and states that *ek væra dauðr, ef ek hefði øðli til þess* ('I would be dead if it were in my nature') (Boer 1888: 133).

Ǫgmundr is depicted as *svartr ok blár* 'black and blue', a description which parallels that of many Icelandic ghosts. He is never directly referred to as a ghost but there is mention of *fjándr* and *troll* (devils and trolls) in various versions of the saga (Boer 1888: 90–91). Even though Ǫgmundr is called a spirit, *andi*, but not a ghost, it seems logical to count him among the undead. He has been reanimated like a revenant, and it is stated that he cannot die — perhaps because he cannot be counted among the living any more. It is up to the readers of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* to decide what they consider Ǫgmundr to be. He is certainly a witch and also a troll, having been made trollish by witchcraft, and a ghost or a vampire.

It seems unlikely that a medieval audience was meant to think about medieval witches, trolls and the undead as different categories. Both the latter were strongly connected with witchcraft and magic, practices that belong to the outlawed world of the pre-Christian and non-Christian (see, e.g., Mitchell 2011). No witch is a normal human, and yet witches are born among human families and live among ordinary Christians; they are eerily both human and

monstrous. The transformative nature of their monstrosity is by no means singular; the verb *tryllask* ('to be turned into a troll, to be enchanted') and the participial adjective *trylldr* ('enchanted, turned into a troll') demonstrate that being trollish is a movable state and the same goes, of course, for the undead, metamorphosing in death from humans to monsters and thus representing an uncanny past that certainly has a family relationship with the Christian present but which must still be abhorred and outlawed.

When it comes to interaction with the deceased there is no shortage of examples of caution and fear in the sagas of Icelanders (see, e.g., Kanerva 2013), although the events are as often as not narrated in a matter-of-fact tone. The *helskór* ('hell-shoes') that Þorgrímr goði 'the Priest' ties when he bids farewell to the dead Vésteinn in *Gísla saga* constitutes one example (*ÍF* VI: 45–46), possibly a trace of an ancient custom, although no other examples of it are attested, and Þorgrímr never explains his motives for acting in this way. Another is the extreme care taken both by Egill Skalla-Grímsson in *Egils saga* (*ÍF* II: 174–75; cf. Matthías Þórðarson 1928) and Arnkell goði 'the Priest' in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*ÍF* IV: 92), when facing their fathers' corpses, to ensure that they will not walk as undead, in one case seemingly successfully but in the other not at all.

And yet in spite of this fear of the undead there are numerous accounts of raids on grave mounds, including a fairly horrifying account in *Harðar saga* of the protagonist's encounter with the Viking Sóti who, according to the earl of Gautland, was *mikit tröll í lífinu, en hálfu meira, síðan hann var dauðr* ('a great troll in life but now even more since he was dead') (*ÍF* XIII: 39). This grave mound is so dangerous that two of Hǫrðr's companions die of the stink that emanates from it, and yet Hǫrðr enters the mound and faces the horror of the undead Viking.

The Afterlife of Deposed Deities

Among the motley crew of uncategorized land spirits, elves, witches, vampires and other trolls, the old pre-Christian Norse gods still walk after Christianity, no longer on their Olympian pinnacle of Valhǫll but among humans whom they entice, mislead and corrupt (see Lassen 2011 and this volume, Chapter 2.1.3). The gods indeed carried various connotations in the literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in some cases being used as a means of social classification, based on their different traditional relationships with the fighting or farming classes (see, e.g., Clunies Ross 1998; Guðrún Nordal 1992; Dronke 1981). The Norse gods may appear in their dethroned afterlife not only in genealogies as euhemerized ancestors but also in more demonic shape in the

legendary sagas and in various *Flateyjarbók* episodes, as well as in the sagas of Icelanders where they often perform precisely the same function as the other large and small creatures from whom the normal Christian humans have appropriated the land (see, e.g., *ÍF* XIII: 126).

In *Sturlu saga* in the *Sturlunga* collection, there is a scene in which the impatient and abrasive Þorbjǫrg, wife of the priest Páll Sǫlvason of Reykholt, has grown tired of the old magnate Sturla's machinations and attacks him with a knife. She aims for his eye and says that she wants to make Sturla *þeim licaztan, er þv vill licazstr vera, enn þat er Oþin* ('resemble most the figure you want to resemble which is Óðinn') (Kaalund 1906–11: I, 113). The comparison is not meant to honour Sturla, nor indeed Óðinn. The latter is being referred to not as a god worthy of worship but as a prankster and witch, a treacherous and demonic figure known for being frequently in disguise and for practising witchcraft, shape-shifting and gender-bending. Apart from highlighting Sturla's treacherous and deceitful nature with the comparison, Þorbjǫrg clearly wants to mark him as a semi-pagan, a primitive male witch whose wiles are unholy and even demonic.

It is a priest's wife who speaks here, but we must still draw the conclusion that by the end of the twelfth century the pre-Christian gods were considered no better than trolls, perhaps they had become trolls (Ármann Jakobsson 2008), and thus it was an insult to be likened to them. Possibly Sturla himself saw things differently. A generation later, it became the lot of his son Snorri to make the pre-Christian gods and the pre-Christian religion into something else: ancient custom worthy of being explored and studied in order to better understand skaldic poetry.

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ÍF I: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF II: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF IV: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF V: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF VI: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF VII: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF XII: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

ÍF XIII: see *Abbreviations for Volume 1*.

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2.2.1 – The Medieval Reception of Eddic Poetry with Mythological Subjects

Annette Lassen

The medieval reception of the eddic poems[1] about pre-Christian Norse gods, with which we are primarily concerned here, is mostly unknown. Nevertheless, the medieval manuscripts, which are our earliest sources for this poetry, and even more so the manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, provide limited information on how Icelanders read and possibly understood these poems in the Middle Ages. The bulk of eddic poetry about the pre-Christian gods is preserved in one of two medieval copies: Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 2365 4to (the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda) and the fragment Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 748 I a 4to, both of which contain eddic poetry exclusively. The meagre manuscript transmission seems to indicate that these poems were much less popular than, for instance, family or legendary sagas, many of which are represented by a plurality of exemplars.

The famous Codex Regius, dated to *c.* 1270, makes little pretension to being a showpiece, suggesting instead by its very plainness that the poems it contains were less esteemed reading material than, for instance, the compilations of kings' sagas, which have come down to us in extravagant folios (e.g., in Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 45 fol., the Codex Frisianus). If we survey what remains, the Codex Regius contains twenty-nine eddic poems, but only the first ten are about gods, the rest having heroic legends as their subjects. The poems about gods are, in the following order, *Vǫluspá* ('The Sibyl's Prophecy'),

[1] On the term 'eddic' and related terms, see the Introduction to this volume.

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Hávamál ('The Speech of the High One'), *Vafþrúðnismál* ('The Speech of Vafþrúðnir'), *Grímnismál* ('The Speech of Grímnir'), *Skírnismál* ('The Speech of Skírnir'), *Hárbarðsljóð* ('The Song of Hárbarðr'), *Hymiskviða* ('The Poem of Hymir'), *Lokasenna* ('The Flyting of Loki'), *Þrymskviða* ('The Poem of Þrymr') and *Alvíssmál* ('The Speech of Alvíss').[2] Five of these, and one extra, *Baldrs draumar* ('The Dreams of Baldr'), are also partly or wholly preserved in the fragment MS AM 748 a I 4to, dated to *c.* 1300: *Hárbarðsljóð* (fragmentary), *Baldrs draumar*, *Skírnismál* (fragmentary) [lacuna], *Vafþrúðnismál* (fragmentary), *Grímnismál* and *Hymiskviða*.[3] Four of the remaining poems about gods in the Codex Regius — that is, *Hávamál*, *Lokasenna*, *Þrymskviða* and *Alvíssmál* — are nowhere else preserved in medieval manuscripts. A special case is *Vǫluspá*, which has the richest transmission (see below). Further eddic poems about gods, beyond those represented in the Codex Regius, are found in manuscripts containing diverse material other than eddic poems: *Rígsþula* ('The Rigmarole of Rígr'), in the Codex Wormianus of Snorri's *Edda* (Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 242 fol.); *Hyndluljóð* ('The Song of Hyndla'), in Flateyjarbók (Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 1005 fol.); and *Grottasǫngr* ('The Song of Grotti') in the Codex Regius of Snorri's *Edda* (Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 2367 4to). There are also eddic poems about gods embedded in the prose of a *fornaldarsaga* or legendary saga, e.g. the riddle contest between the god Óðinn and King Heiðrekr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* 'The Saga of Hervǫr and Heiðrekr'.

Another version of *Vǫluspá*, differing from that of the Codex Regius, is found in Hauksbók (Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 544 4to, mostly from *c.* 1300). This text of the poem was written later than the rest of Hauksbók, and probably by the same scribe who wrote the Codex Wormianus of Snorri's *Edda* (cf. Johansson 1997). It was apparently inserted into Hauksbók after the death of the Icelandic lawman Haukr Erlendsson, who commissioned Hauksbók and wrote parts of it himself. Rudolf Simek argues that the insertion of *Vǫluspá* into Hauksbók, between encyclopaedic texts and *Trójumanna saga*, may draw on an older tradition of placing sibylline oracles in the context of encyclopaedic material, as in the case of Lambert's *Liber Floridus*

[2] *Vǫlundarkviða* ('The Poem of Vǫlundr') is written between *Þrymskviða* and *Alvíssmál*. This poem is generally not considered to belong to the group of eddic poems about gods, but its place in this manuscript, and in MS AM 748 I a 4to, indicates that it may have been classified with them.

[3] The first lines of *Vǫlundarkviða* are written after *Hymiskviða*.

from *c*. 1120 (Simek 1991: 112). Finally, and most informatively on the subject of the medieval reception of eddic poetry about the gods, are the thirty stanzas (or parts of stanzas) from *Vǫluspá* quoted in Snorri's *Edda*. While it is assumed that Snorri wrote his *Edda* around 1225, the oldest manuscript (Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, MS DG 11) cannot be dated earlier than *c*. 1300.

Eddic Poems in Snorri's Edda

The earliest preserved witness to a scholarly reception of the eddic poems about the pre-Christian gods is Snorri's *Edda*. This work predates the Codex Regius collection of eddic poems by roughly half a century. Snorri's work is divided into four parts: *Prologue*, *Gylfaginning* ('Gylfi's Deception'), *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Speech of Poetry') and *Háttatal* ('List of Verse-Forms'). Even though Snorri is the closest we come to an Old Norse mythographer, the *Edda* is really a handbook on poetry (see Chapter 2.2.2 below). It has even been suggested that the *Edda* constitutes a chronicle of the history of poetry (Weber 1986). The Prologue and *Gylfaginning* present the poetry of mythic or prehistoric times (eddic poems), *Skáldskaparmál* mainly presents the poetry of the Old Norse skalds in historic times (from the end of the ninth up until the twelfth century) and finally *Háttatal* presents contemporary poetry from Snorri's own time, most of it authored by Snorri himself (Weber 1986: 406–07). Even if one does not agree entirely with Weber's interpretation, it seems clear that the frame narrative of *Gylfaginning* is intended to explain the sources of the eddic poems and how they were disseminated.

As is discussed above in Chapter 2.1.1, the frame narrative of *Gylfaginning* tells how the Swedish king, Gylfi, visited the 'Asians' from Troy to inquire about their great accomplishments. Three of the 'Asians', called Hár ('High One'), Jafnhár ('Equally High') and Þriði ('Third'), tell Gylfi about their gods, the Æsir, and in doing so regularly quote eddic poems as a form of evidence or source for their claims. The Christian, and thus enlightened, medieval reader or listener would have understood from the start that the tales told by the 'Asians' about the pagan divinities were untrustworthy fables, even deliberate lies, and that the Swedish king was an ignorant heathen (unlike the reader himself), a naive victim of the Asians' deceptions (cf. McKinnell 2013; Lassen 2011: 292–93). Indeed, Snorri explains in the Prologue that the pagans only had an *jarðlig skilning* ('earthly understanding') since they were not possessed of the *andlig spekð* ('spiritual wisdom'; *SnE* 2005: 4) which God had granted Christians. At the end of *Gylfaginning*, the 'Asians', having successfully duped Gylfi (hence the title *Gylfaginning*, 'Gylfi's Deception'), decide to pretend that they themselves

are the Æsir they have just told him about. The deceived Swede goes home and, like a sort of perverted evangelist, reports faithfully to others the stories he has heard. Thus the origin of eddic poems, according to Snorri's *Edda*.

The stories told in *Gylfaginning* are largely based on six or seven eddic poems. Snorri was probably not the first to put eddic poems into writing, but his scholarly or learned use of them is the earliest attested (Lindblad 1977: 3). Snorri knew a number of eddic poems by name, *Vǫluspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Not only the tales told by the gods in *Gylfaginning*, but also the frame within which they are told, is to a great extent based upon these poems. *Vǫluspá* is the poem to which Snorri most often refers, and the structure of *Gylfaginning* is indirectly derived from it. Snorri probably found the names Hár, Jafnhár, Þriði and Gangleri in the catalogue of alternative names for Óðinn in *Grímnismál* (Lassen 2011: 277). It has been considered likely that Snorri had *Vǫluspá*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* at hand when writing his work (Lindblad 1978: 24; Jón Helgason 1953: 28). Apart from these poems, Snorri also knew *Skírnismál*, *Hávamál*, parts of *Lokasenna*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Alvíssmál*, *Grottasǫngr*, *Fáfnismál* and perhaps *Hymiskviða* (Schier 1980: 411; Lindblad 1978: 20). Finally, he quotes stanzas from eddic poems that are otherwise not known outside of his *Edda*. Snorri seems to have known virtually all the eddic poems about the pre-Christian gods that have been preserved to our day as well as some that have not been preserved.

In the *Edda* Snorri quotes around half of the stanzas of *Vǫluspá*,[4] as we know it, and he seems to have organized the information about the Nordic gods in accordance with the structure and contents of this poem. This indicates that he may have considered *Vǫluspá* to be the most important source of knowledge regarding the pagan lore of ancient times, possibly because of the cosmic time span and chronological scope of the poem (cf. Mundal 1992: 180). In 1981, Kurt Schier suggested that in his choice of stanzas from *Vǫluspá*, Snorri particularly emphasized the aspects of the poem which concern the emergence and the destruction of the ancient world at *ragnarǫk* (Schier 1981). Scholars have often found passages of *Vǫluspá* to be obscure and the poem is frequently said to allude to events in the cosmic history of the Old Norse gods rather than fully explain them. Snorri may have encountered similar problems to those faced by later scholars, which would explain his tendency to offer rational explications of the text, as argued by Else Mundal (1992). Mundal further argues that Snorri followed two principles in his omission of stanzas. First of all, he appears to have left out obscure material that he did not understand, using other

[4] For a survey of the stanzas from *Vǫluspá*, quoted by Snorri, cf. Lassen 2013: 4.

sources wherever he found the text of *Vǫluspá* incomprehensible (Mundal 1992: 183). Second, according to Mundal, Snorri omits stanzas about female figures, that is, those dealing with the first cosmic struggle and the burning of Gullveig, the prophetess Heiðr and the stanza about the advent of three giantesses (sts 8, 20–22). This accords with Snorri's copious discussion of male gods in *Gylfaginning* and his relative lack of interest in female deities in the *Edda* as a whole, although he does mention Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld in his prose (*SnE* 2005: 18). Snorri may finally have omitted stanzas 8 and 17, in which the three giantesses are mentioned before the creation of the dwarves, and possibly before the creation of the first human beings, because this idea did not square with his depiction of Óðinn as *Alfǫðr* ('All-Father'), the creator of mankind, a pagan misunderstanding of the Christian God (Mundal 1992: 186). According to Mundal and earlier scholars like Anne Holtsmark (1964), Snorri intended in his *Gylfaginning* to imitate Christian myth in distorted fashion, something which would indicate that he may have perceived certain passages, which he omitted from *Vǫluspá*, as being genuinely pagan.

The frame narrative of *Gylfaginning* is set in prehistoric Sweden, while the tales embedded within the frame form the context in which Snorri places the stanzas he quotes from *Vǫluspá* and other eddic poems. From other Old Norse sources we recognize Sweden as an area where paganism thrived (cf., e.g., *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts ok Gunnars helmings* and *Ynglinga saga*; Lönnroth 1996; Lassen 2011: 260–61 and cf. Chapter 2.1.3 above). The placing of eddic poems within the world of the Æsir may imply that Snorri regarded the poems as genuine, ancient poetry, dating from the time of the Æsir themselves, that is, as ancient fables, *fabulae*, rather than *historiae* (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* I, 8 [13]; *Isidori Etymologiae* XI, iii, 38), in the manner of the Church Fathers reading ancient fables about the Graeco-Roman gods.

On one occasion, stanza 44 from *Grímnismál* is explicitly presented as the utterance of the Æsir themselves: *Svá er hér sagt í orðum sjálfra Ásanna* ('It says so here in the words of the Æsir themselves') (*SnE* 2005: 34). This statement, however, is made by the highly unreliable *persona* of the 'Asian' Hár. Snorri is, in other words, not speaking here in his own voice, but from behind the mask of Hár, a distinction of which other medieval writers, who used the scholarly form of the dialogue, were acutely aware, as a result of their reliance on the principles of ancient rhetorical handbooks such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. This means that we cannot, without reservations, read this sentence (that the poem represented the words of the Æsir) as a statement of Snorri's own belief, even though it is not unlikely that such was in fact the case, given his close association of the poems with the Æsir, in whose (euhemerized) historical existence

he may well have believed. However, for the author of the 'Deception of Gylfi', the mere antiquity of the poems by no means validated their religious message, which was deceitful by definition.

According to the frame narrative of *Gylfaginning*, the extraordinarily accomplished emigrants from Asia deluded the naive king of Sweden and made him believe that they were gods, and it was he who passed on their lying tales and poems to the Swedes. Hence the origin of Old Norse mythology. If Snorri himself believed that at least some of the eddic poems were the sayings of these ancient Asian immigrants, it implies that he considered the poems to date back to remote Nordic antiquity, at least to the time of the Roman Pompey the Great in the first century BC.[5] But Snorri necessarily retained a sceptical attitude towards the truth value of the poems, since to him they were fables, improbable in their manner of representation and unhistorical in content, as is evident from the elaborate frame of deception (*ginning*) in which he embeds these poems. At one point in *Gylfaginning*, Snorri has the 'Asians' use the phrase *forn vísindi* to describe the contents of a stanza of *Vǫluspá* (*SnE* 2005: 12, here probably connoting 'ancient prophecy'; cf. the use of the word *vísindakona* ('prophetess') in *Páls saga postola*, *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Óláfs saga helga*) to underscore the idea that his contemporary enlightened reader should be wary of putting faith in the pagan story of the creation.

The description of Óðinn's manner of speech in *Ynglinga saga* indicates that some eddic poems, specifically *Hávamál*, were regarded as the sayings of men once taken to be gods. One of the Christian methods for rationalizing (false) pagan gods was euhemerism (cf. Chapter 2.1.1 above). An important source on Óðinn for the author of *Ynglinga saga* was probably the poem *Hávamál* (cf. Lassen 2011). The title means 'The Sayings of Hár (The High One)', that is, Óðinn. Hár is also the name of one of the three Asians we encounter in *Gylfaginning*. Furthermore, in *Ynglinga saga* (ch. 6, *ÍF* XXVI: 17), we read that the euhemerized or historical Óðinn *mælti ... allt hendingum, svá sem nú er þat kveðit, er skáldskapr heitir* ('spoke ... everything in verses, just as what we now call *skáldskapr* [poetry] is recited'). Accordingly, the medieval writer of the saga understood the poetic *Hávamál* to represent the very words of the ancient chieftain Óðinn, who in Nordic antiquity was taken to be a god, according to *Ynglinga saga*.

[5] *Ynglinga saga* informs us that Óðinn escaped to the North as a result of the military expansion of the Romans. The Prologue of Snorri's *Edda* in the Codex Wormianus relates specifically that it was the Roman General Pompey the Great from whom Óðinn was fleeing. Pompey's military campaigns to the east, which are being referred to here, took place in 67–62 BC.

Snorri presents the eddic stanzas in much the same manner. When introducing a stanza from *Vafþrúðnismál*, he says *Hér segir svá Vafþrúðnir jǫtunn* ('here the giant Vafþrúðnir says so'; *SnE* 2005: 10). A stanza from *Lokasenna* is cited as the words of Óðinn himself: *hér er sagt at Óðinn mælir sjálfr* ('here it is said that Óðinn himself says'; *SnE* 2005: 21). Njǫrðr and Skaði are said to have 'recited' stanzas attributed to them (*þá kvað hann þetta*, 'then he said this'; *Þá kvað Skaði þetta*, 'Then Skaði said this'; *SnE* 2005: 24). Heimdallr is said in *Heimdalargaldr* to 'say himself' (*enn segir hann sjálfr*, 'again he says himself'; *SnE* 2005: 26), and Freyr to utter the words of *Skírnismál* (*SnE* 2005: 31). *Vǫluspá* is presented in a similar way. Although Snorri has the 'Asian' Hár introduce stanzas from the poem with phrases like *Svá sem segir í Vǫluspá* ('Just as it says in *Vǫluspá*'; *SnE* 2005: 9, 12) and *svá segir í Vǫluspá* ('it says so in *Vǫluspá*'; *SnE* 2005: 9, 14, 20, 35, 49), or even without reference to the poem by name (as in *SnE* 2005: 16, 19, 53), he seems to have understood the title literally as meaning 'The *Vǫlva*'s (or Sibyl's) Prophecy', since on one occasion Snorri merely refers to *Vǫluspá* as what 'she' said: *ok þessi segir hon nǫfn þeira dverganna* ('and she says these are the names of the dwarves'; *SnE* 2005: 16). With this phrasing, Snorri places *Vǫluspá* in the mouth of the ancient prophetess, the *vǫlva*, something which shows that, at least within the frame of *Gylfaginning*, he makes the ancient 'Asians' present the poem as being the actual words of the prophetess, as the other poems are said to be the words of gods or giants. Thus the eddic poems seem to have been read as the sayings of the Æsir or Asians themselves, a tradition which as it turns out was continued by scholars in early modern studies until around the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The Codex Regius of the Eddic Poems

The oldest preserved manuscript containing the entire *Vǫluspá* is the Codex Regius of the eddic poems, which is, as mentioned above, dated to *c.* 1270. It was written by a single scribe around fifty years after Snorri Sturluson wrote his *Edda*. It has been suggested that the manuscript was written and preserved for a long time in the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar (Lindblad 1954: 291; Stefán Karlsson 2000: 243–44; Helgi Guðmundsson 2002; Katrín Axelsdóttir 2003). The compiler of this collection of poems and the scribe of the Codex Regius may not have been the same person, since it is possible that the collection antedates the manuscript (see, however, Lindblad 1980: 160). Some of the poems in the manuscript are introduced or completed by a short prose narrative. Thus approximately 13 per cent of the text in the Codex Regius is prose

(Lindblad 1980: 142). Some of the heroic poems could be termed prosimetric, and some are followed by comments in prose by the compiler or redactor; this is, however, not the case with the mythic poems or poems about gods. In 1954 Gustaf Lindblad argued on orthographical and palaeographical grounds that the poems of the Codex Regius were compiled from a variety of older written collections. The palaeography and orthography in the heroic poems is more homogenous than in the poems on gods, which led Lindblad to conclude that the written tradition of the heroic poems was older than that of the mythic poems, since the greater homogeneity of the heroic poems indicated that they had been transmitted together for a longer period. Lindblad argued, however, that small written collections of mythic poems may have existed before 1270. Snorri may have used such collections when he composed his *Edda*. As stated previously, he may have had at least three eddic poems in front of him in written form, that is, *Vǫluspá*, *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál*.

In its prominent position at the beginning of the Codex Regius, *Vǫluspá* serves as a kind of prologue to the collection of poems. By placing the poem at the beginning of the manuscript, the compiler of the poems of the collection may have been inspired by the importance that Snorri attributed to the poem in his *Edda* fifty years earlier. The first half of the mythic poems in the Codex Regius comprises poems in which Óðinn is the main character (*Hávamál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*) or plays an important part (*Vǫluspá*, *Hárbarðsljóð*), which implies that the compiler or redactor of the collection of poems considered him the most important of the pagan gods. However, in the latter half of the mythic poems the dominant figure is Þórr (first and foremost in *Hymiskviða*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál*, but he also plays a significant role in *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*), implying that the compiler or redactor considered his importance close to Óðinn's in the pagan pantheon. The two sections, on Óðinn and Þórr respectively, are, however, divided by a poem about Freyr (*Skírnismál*); immediately after that poem follows *Hárbarðsljóð*, a quarrel between Óðinn and Þórr, which forms a transition between the two sections. Finally, in between *Þrymskviða* and *Alvíssmál*, we find *Vǫlundarkviða*, which is traditionally considered to belong to the group of heroic poems, as it treats a version of the legend of Vǫlundr (Weland), the famous smith.

The original compiler of the collection of poems preserved in the Codex Regius was displaying his scholarship through his ordering of the material, which is possibly also true of the editorial comments that accompany some of the poems. They may, of course, not be the words of our scribe or compiler, but adopted from other scribes, compilers or editors of older collections contain-

ing the same poems.[6] Nevertheless, these comments — whoever wrote them — provide us with information about the reception of the eddic poems when they were written down. Sometimes the prose seems to inform us about the perceived antiquity of a poem, as when we are told at the very end of the manuscript that the poem *Hamðismál*, *Þetta ero kǫlluð Hamðismál in forno* ('is called the Poem of Hamðir, the ancient one'; *NK* 274), a title which may also imply that the commentator knew a later poem by the same name. Sometimes the commentator distances himself from what he must have regarded as outdated points of religion or belief, expressed in an ancient poem, as when he states: *Þat var trúa í fornescio, at menn væri endrbornir, en þat er nú kǫlluð kerlingavilla* ('In antiquity it was believed that men could be reborn, but this is now called old wives' heresy'; *NK* 161).

A religious interest in the subjects of these poems would not have been at all surprising if the Codex Regius of the eddic poems was written and stored in the library of the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar, founded in 1133 according to tradition. Unfortunately, we find no such comments on the mythic poems. The order in which the compiler arranges the poems of the Codex Regius, starting with poems about gods and moving on to poems about heroes, indicates a sense of cosmic chronology according to which the gods lived in prehistoric times and the legendary heroes somewhat later. The idea that chronology formed the organizing principle of the Codex Regius may also partly explain the positioning of *Vǫluspá* at the beginning of the manuscript, since this poem opens with an account of the beginning of the world and ends with prophecies of its imminent (and for the scribe already past) destruction. The prominent position of the poem implies that it was regarded as a key to the understanding of the poems following, in much the same way that *Vǫluspá* is used in Snorri's *Edda* as a key text for describing the chronology and fate of the pagan world.

[6] For an overview of different theses on the origin of the prose in the Codex Regius, cf. Gunnell 1995: 194–203, 233–55; see also Lindblad 1980: 162.

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2.2.2 – The Reception in Skaldic Poetry and Snorri Sturluson's *Skáldskaparmál*

Margaret Clunies Ross

Unlike eddic poetry, which there is good reason to consider medieval Icelanders thought of as old, from the perspective of their own age, skaldic poetry was the creation of Scandinavian poets for the entertainment of audiences and patrons of the historical period. Granted, the earliest skaldic poetry was the product of the period before the conversion to Christianity and before the age of writing, but it had been handed down orally and was remembered and recorded in writing by people of the late twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This chronological separation of skaldic from eddic poetry, and the technical differences between the two poetic kinds (see **Some Technical Terms** in the Introduction to this volume), was probably what caused Snorri Sturluson to separate his treatment of the two kinds of poetry into distinct sections of his *Edda*. Eddic poetry by and large appears in the *Gylfaginning* section of the *Edda*, while skaldic poetry is treated in two sections, its diction being analysed in *Skáldskaparmál* ('The Speech of Poetry') and its metrical forms

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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in *Háttatal* ('List of Verse-Forms').[1] The latter will not be considered here, as it has little directly to do with the subjects of myth and religion.

The Reception in Skáldskaparmál

The reception of the pre-Christian mythological poetry of the Poetic Edda within Snorri's Prologue and *Gylfaginning* has been discussed in the previous chapter (2.2.1). To some extent the same overarching point of view applies also to *Skáldskaparmál*, as the so-called 'advice to young poets' paragraph indicates:

> En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjǫlða með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er hulit er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til froðleiks ok skemtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sǫgur at taka ór skáldskapinum fornar kenningar þær er hǫfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannyndi þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá réttri trú, ok þá næst frá Tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaþir fǫlsuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera. (*SnE* 1998: I, 5)
>
> (But these things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obscurely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly inquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use. Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book, where it is told what happened when mankind went astray from the true faith, and after that about the Turks, how the people of Asia, known as Æsir, distorted the accounts of the events that took place in Troy so that the people of the country would believe that they were gods.) (Faulkes 1987: 64–65)

This passage still concerns itself with the way in which Christians should approach the old mythology — with care and circumspection, not believing its truth value except in accordance with the theoretical frame established in the Prologue ('the beginning of this book'). However, within *Skáldskaparmál* itself Snorri is more concerned with the exegesis and exemplification of all

[1] This statement is true of the Regius, Trajectinus and Wormianus manuscripts, but not of the Uppsala codex, which includes some material in *Gylfaginning* that the other manuscripts place within *Skáldskaparmál*; see further Heimir Pálsson (2012: lxxiv–xci).

kinds of kennings[2] and *heiti* (poetic synonyms), including those with mythological content, of which there are many (see further on this subject de Vries 1934; Marold 1990). In his explanation of the nature of kennings and *heiti* he does not overtly concern himself with their veracity in terms of Christian doctrine, nor does he explicitly compare or contrast them with Christian concepts, except in that part of the work that concedes that some kenning patterns, such as those for lord or ruler, could be applied to the Christian God as well as to secular rulers (*SnE* 1998, 1, 78; Faulkes 1987: 127–28). Rather, Snorri seeks to explain the often obscure character of skaldic kennings in terms of the myths of the pre-Christian religion and the events and divine actions represented in those myths. This is true even of those figures that do not directly refer to the old gods or other beings of the Old Norse mythological world, such as giants and dwarfs. As Anthony Faulkes has observed (*SnE* 1998, 1, xxxi), 'his concept of causation is still largely mythological'.

This heavily mythological mind-set determines the overall structure of *Skáldskaparmál* and to some extent obscures the fact that many kinds of kennings do not depend on references to pre-Christian myths at all but rather to conventional imagery of other kinds, such as comparisons between storms and battle or horses and ships.[3] After its initial framing narrative, a conversation about poetry between the sea-giant Ægir and the god of poetry, Bragi, at a banquet, *Skáldskaparmál* takes as its subject the various kinds of kennings and *heiti* in the corpus of skaldic verse, exemplifying each of them in turn with quotations from the compositions of a great many skalds who lived between the late ninth and the twelfth centuries.

This exposition is organised according to an implicit set of hierarchical principles that accords the greatest importance to kennings and *heiti* for the Old Norse gods and, after that, to a series of referents for the natural world, like the sea, sun and heavenly bodies, as well as particular human artefacts or actions, like ships, weapons and battle, and various kinds of human agents, such as seafarers, warriors and rulers.[4] Within the group of kennings for the old gods we can also observe a hierarchy, so that kennings for Óðinn appear first

[2] On kennings, see the Introduction, where the term is explained and exemplified.

[3] One example of many battle-kennings is *hregg geira* ('a storm of spears'), while a common type of ship-kenning is *borðhǫlkvir* ('plank-horse'). Both these examples are taken from Þorbjǫrn hornklofi's *Glymdrápa* ('Clangour-*drápa*') (*c.* 890), at st. 5/2 and 3/6 respectively (*SkP* 1.1: 84–85, 81–82).

[4] I have argued elsewhere (Clunies Ross 1987: 80–96) that Snorri's arrangement of the kennings and *heiti* in *Skáldskaparmál* and his explanations of their genesis is in accordance with

and are lavishly illustrated, then come kennings for Þórr, and after that kennings for other gods and goddesses. It is notable that, although the subject of 'poetry' is not a divine figure per se (though an important myth, narrated in *Skáldskaparmál*, tells how the mead of poetry began its life as the blood of an animate being, Kvasir), the subject of poetry comes immediately after the subject of Óðinn and before that of Þórr, indicating both the importance of the topic and its semi-animate status according to the old mythology.

Aside from the poetic examples themselves, culled from the works of the skalds Snorri refers to as *hǫfuðskáld* ('chief poets'), the text of *Skáldskaparmál* frequently breaks into extended prose narrative, as Snorri recounts mythological stories, which he presents as the reason why a particular kind of kenning takes the form it does and can be used in certain ways in poetry. On this level of causation, to take an example, there is no room for doubting that the existence of the myth of the god Þórr's fight with the giant Hrungnir, in which the giant was persuaded to stand on his stone shield, believing the god was going to strike him from underground, is the reason why poets are able to refer to a shield using the kenning-pattern 'the bridge of the giant's footsoles'. The extended explanatory mythic narratives of *Skáldskaparmál* (and the same could be said of some of those in *Gylfaginning*) go well beyond the requirements of an exposition of the nature of skaldic kennings, and seem to reveal a delight in the stories for their own sake, not as articles of belief but as inherited cultural property.

Pre-Christian References in Christian Skaldic Poetry

That delight in the myths, which seems so evident in Snorri's work, and the linked delight in poetic obscurity (*þat er hulit er kveðit*), chiefly conveyed through the use of kennings and fragmented word order in the diction of earlier skaldic poetry, was to be repudiated to some extent by Christian poets composing from the mid-twelfth century onwards. In Iceland, but not in Norway, it seems, skaldic poetry continued to be used as a vehicle for religious expression until the end of the Middle Ages (see *SkP* VII (2007), a volume devoted to Christian skaldic poetry from the mid-twelfth until the late fourteenth century). One difference from earlier practice was that Christian narratives were now treated instead of the pre-Christian myths,[5] and the subjects included

the Prologue's claim that humans who had lost the name of the true God were nevertheless able to perceive the general structure of the cosmos through the use of their five senses.

[5] The praise of rulers was, however, the dominant theme of pre-Christian skaldic verse and

saints' lives and the cult of the Virgin Mary, in particular, as well as specific topics of Christian teaching, like the importance of the observance of Sunday as a day of rest (Anon *Leiðarvísan* ('Way-Guidance'), *SkP* VII.1: 137–78) and the place of penitence and the redeeming power of Christ's passion (Anon *Harmsól* ('Sorrow-Sun') and Anon *Líknarbraut* ('The Way of Grace'), *SkP* VII.1: 70–132, 228–86). In addition, although kennings using pre-Christian mythological references could still be used, many new kennings were created, based on the old models, for God, Christ, the Virgin and many other Christian topics. On the whole pre-Christian mythological kennings in Christian poetry are decorative and denuded of religious significance, although they have seemed oddly discordant in the context of strongly Christian sentiments to some modern scholars. It is important to understand, however, that they function like references to the classical gods and classical mythology in early modern European literature; in both cases they elevate the style by alluding to the high-status literature of the past but do not imply any kind of religious belief in the pre-Christian gods. However, the fact that such references continued to be used in Iceland (and in the Norse Atlantic Islands) in the poetry that developed under the influence of the skaldic art beyond the Middle Ages (in such genres as *rímur* and ballads) does seem to indicate a unique tolerance for the mention of pagan concepts in a Christian society well beyond what we find in other contemporary European literatures.

The Ontological Status of Mythological References in Skáldskaparmál *and in Viking-Age and Medieval Norse Poetry*

Even though skaldic poetry dated from a more recent historical period than most eddic verse (at least in the minds of medieval people), Snorri and his contemporaries would have been aware that the poetry of the earliest skalds was composed before the conversion to Christianity and thus belonged to the thought-world of paganism. They would also have been aware that the objectives of the early skalds — the reasons why they were composing in the first place — were to praise the merits of their patrons, the pre-Christian rulers of Norway and its various regions, some of which, like Trøndelag, gained a

continued to be a major topic of skaldic poetry after the conversion, as did much occasional verse and a number of other genres of a predominantly secular nature. The topic of the encomium was linked closely to religious themes both before and after the conversion: before, in that the ruler was often represented as either descended from the gods or acting like a god; after, in that the Christian ruler was a secular representative of Christ on earth.

reputation among later Christian Scandinavian historians for the promotion of paganism at the time of the *siðaskipti*.

These skalds often make an implicit comparison between their patrons and the Norse gods by using the names of gods as the base-words of ruler- or warrior-kennings, such as the Norwegian skald Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson's *Njǫrðr naddregns*, 'Njǫrðr <god> of the spear-rain' [BATTLE> WARRIOR = Hákon inn góði 'the Good'] (Eyv Lv 2, 1, 2[I], *SkP* I.1: 216–18). They also mention the rulers' protection of heathen sanctuaries (*vé*) and the observance of heathen sacrifice (*blót*). Not only do the poems of this period use kennings that allude to pre-Christian myths and their protagonists, often gods and giants, but they also refer to the minor supernatural beings of the Old Norse mythological world, like valkyries and *dísir*, female tutelary spirits.[6] A subgenre of the skaldic encomium, the ekphrasis or poem describing a pictorial subject, was devoted to the verbal description of mythological and heroic narratives which had been depicted on shields, house walls and other hard surfaces. Three substantial ekphraseis exist, *Ragnarsdrápa*[7] ('Ragnarr's *drápa*') by Bragi Boddason (late ninth century), *Haustlǫng* ('Autumn Long') by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (*c*. 900) and *Húsdrápa* ('*Drápa* of the House') by Úlfr Uggason (*c*. 985), as well as small fragments by other early skalds, chiefly on the subject of the god Þórr's fight with the World Serpent, Miðgarðsormr (cf. Fuglesang 2007; Clunies Ross 2007). All three of the ekphraseis named above have been transmitted in some manuscripts of the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri's *Edda* and are accompanied by extensive prose retellings of the myths referred to in the poems. In at least one manuscript (the Codex Wormianus) some of the poetry was probably added after the prose text, and then in incomplete form.

There is no evidence from Snorri's handling of this material that he or medieval copyists of the *Edda* found it particularly troubling or challenging. On the contrary, his predilection for mythological explanations of the origins of kennings and *heiti* indicates a continuing mental engagement with the fundamental premises of the Old Norse mythological world-picture. Occasionally he

[6] For two examples, both dated *c*. 900, see Þorbjǫrn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* 2/1 (Þhorn *Harkv*, *SkP* I.1: 95) for the valkyrie reference and Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Haustlǫng* 17/4 (Þjóð *Haustl*, *SkP* III: 1, 451) for the *dísir*, who, the poet Þjóðólfr says, caused the giant Hrungnir's shield to fly beneath his footsoles (in contrast to Snorri Sturluson's explanation, mentioned above, which attributes this action to the giant himself, who is said to have been bamboozled by Þórr's assistant Þjalfi into thinking the god would strike him from underground).

[7] A *drápa* is a long formal poem, usually in honour of a patron, with one or more refrains (*stef*).

comments in his prose explanations on aspects of pre-Christian lore or customs that his audience might not be expected to know, as when he explains why the kenning *Hǫlga haugþak* ('the mound-thatch of Hǫlgi') must be understood as a kenning for gold in a poem by the Icelandic skald Skúli Þorsteinsson (Skúli *Svǫlðr* 4/3–4, *SkP* III: 364–65) (*c*. 970–1040) about the battle of Svǫlðr. He identifies Hǫlgi as the eponymous ruler of Hálogaland in the north of Norway, and father of Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr, whom Hákon jarl Sigurðarson of Hlaðir (r. *c*. 970–*c*. 995) is said to have worshipped, according to various sources, including *Jómsvíkinga saga*:

> Þau [i.e. Hǫlgi and Þorgerðr] váru bæði blótuð ok var haugr Hǫlga kastaðr, ǫnnur fló af gulli eða silfri (þat var blótféit) en ǫnnur fló af moldu ok grjóti. (*SnE* 1998, I: 60)
>
> (Sacrifices were offered to them both, and Holgi's mound was raised with alternately a layer of gold or silver — this was the money offered in sacrifice — and a layer of earth and stone.) (Faulkes 1987: 112)

We may infer, both from Snorri's copious use of mythological material from the pre-Christian world-picture and the neutral manner in which he deals with it, that both his interest in it and knowledge of it were great, but that he was not polemically engaged, at least for the purposes of poetic pedagogy. However, if we consider the reception of pre-Christian myth and religion among the skalds of the Viking Age, we are looking at a rather different ontological picture. The classic statement from a skald from the *siðaskipti* age about what the old religion meant to him as a poet occurs in several stanzas by the Icelandic poet Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld 'Troublesome Poet' Óttarsson (Hfr Lv 6–10, *SkP* V, forthcoming), preserved in the Mǫðruvallabók manuscript of *Hallfreðar saga* and in several manuscripts of the longer saga of Óláfr Tryggvason. Here he laments the fact that his Christian patron, King Óláfr Tryggvason, has put pressure on him to reject his pagan faith and with it the use of pagan mythological references in favour of the new faith based on the Christian God (cf. Whaley 2003). Among other things, Hallfreðr complains that the new religion is not *skáldligr* ('fitting for a poet'), because it abandons the old mythological ornaments of poetic diction.

From this we can infer that the use of mythological references in skaldic kennings and *heiti* was as much a stylistic resource valued by skalds as an indication of their religious faith. However, the fact that, after the conversion, skalds did indeed steer clear of pagan mythological kennings for some considerable time, though they returned to them again in the twelfth century as poetic ornaments

(cf. Fidjestøl 1993), indicates that their attachment to pagan mythological references must have been more than merely ornamental. Because skaldic kennings and *heiti* belong to a system of references dependent on a world-view that was to a large extent based on pre-Christian Norse religion, their use by poets of the pre-Christian period must have embodied both elements of convention and elements of belief or at least adherence to a set of customary tenets based ultimately in the old religion.

In the Scandinavian skaldic tradition the ideology associated with the self-image of skalds and the composition of poetry was firmly anchored in pre-Christian mythology, notably that associated with the god Óðinn, who was considered to have stolen the art of poetry, conceptualized as an inebriating drink, mead, and brought it back to Ásgarðr for the gods and men from a giant, who had himself stolen it from some dwarfs. Snorri relates the complex history of this theft early in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 1998: 1, 3–5; Faulkes 1987: 61–64), and, as mentioned above, places kennings for poetry in second place behind those for Óðinn. Poets of the pre-Christian period were accustomed to beginning their compositions secure in their status as beneficiaries of divinely sanctioned inspiration, as we find in the opening stanza of the poem *Vellekla* ('Lack of Gold'), composed for the staunchly pagan Hákon jarl Sigurðarson by the Icelandic skald Einarr skálaglamm 'Tinkle-Scales' Helgason, which calls his audience to attention with the words *heyr, jarl, Kvasis dreyra* ('hear, jarl, the blood of Kvasir') (Eskál *Vell* 1/2, *SkP* 1.1: 283). Kvasir was the name of a mythical being created from the fermented spittle of the gods, and he was killed by some dwarfs, who made the poetic mead out of his blood. Hence 'Kvasir's blood' is a kenning for poetry or, in this case, for the poem Einarr is about to recite. The close connection between the art of poetry and divine patronage of poets was continued in Christian skaldic poetry, but here the poets were often clerics of the Christian Church, whether priests or monks, and the invocation of divine power was directed to the Christian God rather than to Kvasir's blood, the drink of dwarfs, Óðinn's gift and many other similar circumlocutions for poetry that we find in earlier skaldic verse.

The ontological status of references to myths and religious practices in the skaldic poetry of the pre-Christian period is difficult to gauge (see de Vries 1934: 80–84). On the one hand, poets were using a conventional system of kennings, which often built into their structure references to pagan myths, but were not themselves directly religious in the way they were used. On the other hand, the poets' very use of this system presumes a cultural background in which the skald and his audience participated in an acceptance of a living religious tradition, however stereotyped. As we have seen, a standard type of

kenning for a warrior might use the name of a god as its base-word, like Glúmr Geirason's kenning for King Haraldr gráfeldr 'Greycloak' in his *erfidrápa* ('memorial poem') for that Norwegian king (d. 970): *Freyr foldar eggjar mækis* ('the Freyr <god> of the land of the blade of the sword [SHIELD> WARRIOR]') (Glúmr *Gráf* 3/5, 6, 8, *SkP* 1.1: 251–52). While Haraldr is clearly the intended referent of this kenning, it is uncertain whether the use of the god-name Freyr is significant in a religious sense, or is mainly a conventional way of flattering the dead king by comparing him to a god and obeying the rules of alliteration. Is there a particular point in Glúmr's comparing Haraldr to Freyr rather than to another god of war, like Óðinn or Týr? It is possible that the poet's choice of Freyr as base-word here is meant to enhance the king's warlike reputation. Although this god's association with battle is not well attested in the extant literature, it is present in, for example, the unusual battle-kenning *Freys leik* ('the sport of Freyr') in Þorbjǫrn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* 6/4 (*SkP* 1.1: 99–100).

All skaldic poetry of the pre-Christian age provokes similar questions of interpretation. Most of it has, of course, been written down in much later texts, particularly in manuscripts of kings' sagas and Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*. Although the scribes who recorded these poetic texts may frequently have misunderstood and sometimes misinterpreted the texts, it is the general consensus among skaldic scholars that the poetry has on the whole been faithfully preserved. The medieval prose historians and pedagogues who later made use of the poetry frequently offered their own interpretations of its contents, which are sometimes at variance with what the poetry itself seems to be saying. On the whole, though, this poetry provides an insight into the pre-Christian thought-world, conventional though its lens usually is.

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2.2.3 – The Reception in Medieval Historiography

Annette Lassen

The Medieval Reception within Scandinavia

In the Middle Ages, there was no clear boundary between what we today would term historiography, on the one hand, and fiction on the other. Even though we generally read Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* and the bulk of Icelandic sagas as works of fiction (since Carsten Hauch, professor at the University of Copenhagen, argued in 1848–49 that there is a *kunstforstandig Plan* ('an artistic plan') in *Njáls saga*; Mundal 1977: 37), many of these texts were written as, and functioned as, historiography. In 2002, D. H. Green formulated a definition of fiction along the following lines: for a piece of work to be received as fiction, a contract between the writer and the audience is necessary, according to which both parties agree to pretend that certain happenings have occurred, even though both parties are well aware that this is not the case (Green 2002: 11–12). According to Mortensen (2007), there is no evidence that such a contract existed between Saxo, his patrons and readers. According to the *Praefatio*, the frames of reference of his work are historiographical. In most cases we do not have any evidence either that such a contract existed between readers/listeners and writers of family sagas, legendary sagas or kings' sagas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. If we follow Green's definition,

Annette Lassen is Associate Professor at the Arnamagnæan Institute in the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics (Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab) at the University of Copenhagen. Her research focuses on Old Norse literature and mythology and their reception. Her publications include *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi* (2003), *Odin på kristent pergament* (2011), *Islændingesagaernes verden* (2017) and the edition *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* (2011).

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the majority of Icelandic sagas were intended as historiography — at least up until some point in the fourteenth century when fable-like sagas such as *Króka-Refs saga* and *Bósa saga* were written.

Saxo Grammaticus's Gesta Danorum

One of the oldest historiographical works composed in Scandinavia involving pagan gods and attributing to them an active part in the narrative is Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* ('History of the Danes'). We do not have much certain information about Saxo. He is believed to have been educated in northern France, most likely in Reims. Saxo wrote his *History of the Danes* at the request of Archbishop Absalon, who died in 1201. He used Icelandic sources and informants, as he tells us in a well-known paragraph in his *Praefatio*.[1] It has been suggested that Saxo probably knew more or less all poems and sagas about Danish material that existed in Iceland (Bjarni Guðnason 1981: 81). Scholars have argued that he knew *Eiríksdrápa*, the lost kings' saga *Hryggjarstykki*, *Íslendingabók*, *Ágrip* and *Orkneyinga saga*. It has only been possible to date a few legendary sagas to the latter part of the twelfth century (i.e., *Yngvars saga* and *Skjǫldunga saga*; Hofmann 1981; Gottskálk Jensson 2009; Lassen 2013), but, even so, the *Gesta Danorum* has material in common with a number of other sagas, probably of later date in their present form, including *Gautreks saga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Qrvar-Odds saga* and the already-mentioned *Skjǫldunga saga*. Saxo may have heard Icelandic informants tell about legendary heroes, and he may have had written sagas at his elbow.

Saxo has often been criticized by students of Old Norse religion because of his explicitly polemical attitude towards the pagan gods, in contrast to Snorri Sturluson's more sympathetic attitude in both the *Edda* and *Heimskringla*. In Saxo's writing, the pagan gods are clearly false and flawed; his work is therefore more reminiscent of the Latin clerical tradition. Different theories or methods for explaining paganism had been used for centuries within the Christian Church, such as euhemerism, idolatry and demonology (cf. Chapters 2.1.1–3 in

[1] *Quorum thesauros historicarum rerum pignoribus refertos curiosius consulens haut paruam presentis operis partem ex eorum relationis imitatione contexui. Nec arbitros habere contempsi, quos tanta uetustatis peritia callere cognoui* ('Thus I have scrutinized their packed store of historical treasures and composed a considerable part of this present work by copying their narratives, not scorning, where I recognized such skill in ancient lore, to take these men as witnesses') (*Saxo* 2015: 1, Pr. 1. 4: 6–7).

this volume). These strategies are, for example, found in the writings of Church Fathers such as Lactantius (240–320), Tertullian (*c.* 160–*c.* 222), Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Isidore of Seville (560–636), and they also became known in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages. Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones* is believed to be among Saxo's sources, even though he may only have known it indirectly through the *Glossa ordinaria*, a commentary to the Apocryphal *Liber sapientiae* (Friis-Jensen 1993: 231; 2000: 108). It has been argued that passages in the *Gesta Danorum* are likely to be inspired by Lactantius's work (Friis-Jensen 2000: 101), and Saxo's stories about Othinus appear in some cases to be illustrations of Lactantius's theological points, as will be discussed below (Lassen 2011: 216).

Saxo and his contemporary historiographers were, of course, learned Christians. They wrote as Christian scholars, explaining paganism in accordance with the learning of their time, and they would thus have disagreed with any understanding of pagan gods or paganism that could be regarded as inconsistent with the learning of the Church. They had no interest in explaining or comprehending pagan gods in accordance with a pagan world-view, since such a world-view was considered false and flawed.

In a famous passage in his first book, Saxo explains the nature of pagan gods (I, v. 2–6). In Old Norse historiographical texts, the nature of the gods is revealed through the narratives of which they are a part. According to Saxo, there were originally three kinds of sorcerers: giants (*gigantes*), those who possessed prophetic abilities (*ars Phitonica*) and, finally, as a hybrid of the two groups, human beings (*homines*). All three groups possessed magical abilities (*praestigia*). The magicians conquered the giants and were then held to be gods. The magicians were able to predict the future, to assume different shapes and to conceal their appearance under false guises. The false gods are, according to Saxo, descended from an intermingling of these two classes of beings. The size and abilities of the gods were inferior to those of their parents, but they were nonetheless believed to be gods as a consequence of delusion. People were tricked by their magic into worshipping them as gods. In his sixth book (*Saxo* 2015: I, vi. 5. 3: 378–81) Saxo identifies these gods with Othinus and Thor:

> Olim enim quidam magice artis imbuti, Thor uidelicet et Othinus aliique complures miranda praestigiorum machinatione callentes, obtentis simplicium animis diuinitatis sibi fastigium arrogare coeperunt. Quippe Noruagiam, Suetiam ac Daniam uanissimae credulitatis laqueis circumuentas ad cultus sibi pendendi studium concitantes praecipuo ludificationis suae contagio resperserunt. Adeo namque fallacie eorum effectus percrebuit, ut in ipsis ceteri quandam numinum potentiam uenerantes eosque deos uel deorum complices autumantes uenificiorum

> auctoribus solennia uota dependerent et errori sacrilego respectum sacris debitum exhiberent.
>
> (At one time certain individuals, initiated into the arts of sorcery, namely, Thor, Odin, and a number of others who were skilled at conjuring up marvellous illusions, clouded the minds of simple men and began to appropriate the exalted rank of godhead. Norway, Sweden, and Denmark were ensnared in a groundless conviction, urged to a devoted worship of these frauds and infected by the smirch of their gross imposture. The results of their deception spread, so that all other realms came to revere some kind of divine power in them, believing they were gods or the confederates of gods; they rendered solemn prayers to these magic-mongers and paid the respect to an impious heresy which should have gone to true religion.)

Saxo does not identify the false gods with demons, as writers like Lactantius do, and as is described in Chapter 2.1.3 above on demonism. Such an identification is, indeed, quite rare in historiographical works and is almost exclusively encountered in connection with descriptions of idolatry. According to Saxo, pagan worship was both a result of the deception practised by the false gods and a consequence of the ignorance of the pagans themselves. In the seventh book, Halfdanus wins a victory, which leads the Swedes to believe that he is the son of the mighty Thor, and, accordingly, they begin to worship him as a god (*Saxo* 2015: I, vii. 2.3: 454–55). This account of the origin of pagan worship is reminiscent of *Ynglinga saga*. There the progenitors of the Ynglings — Óðinn, Njǫrðr and Freyr — are not guilty of actively tricking the Swedes into worshipping them. Rather, pagan worship is said to begin because Óðinn blesses his people before battle. The Swedes misunderstand his blessings and (falsely) believe that they will be victorious in battle and therefore begin to invoke him in cases of emergency (ch. 2, *ÍF* XXVI: 11). People further begin to make sacrifices to Óðinn and his twelve chieftains, and they name them gods and believe in them for a long time (ch. 7, *ÍF* XXVI: 19–20). The (Christian) readers or listeners understand immediately that Óðinn cannot be a god, since it is told that he makes sacrifices for them (ch. 8, *ÍF* XXVI: 20–21). It is implicit in the narrative, however, that the pagans of times past would not be able to draw this conclusion.[2] When Óðinn has died, the Swedes believe that he has travelled to the old Ásgarðr. At this point in the history of the pagan past, according to *Ynglinga saga*, a shift occurs in their perception of Óðinn. This is when the

[2] The idea of the limited understanding of pagans is never stated in *Ynglinga saga*, but seems to be lurking underneath the narrative. Cf. ch. 2.2.1 where the concepts of *jarðlig* ('earthly') and *andlig* ('spiritual') wisdom in Snorri's *Edda* are discussed.

worship of Óðinn really begins, as the pagan Swedes furthermore believe that he shows himself to them before battles. There is no direct deceit on Óðinn's behalf; it is a pagan misunderstanding of the true identity of a powerful man.

For historiographers, euhemerism was an obvious choice of a general strategy for the description of pagan gods, as in the examples given above. In *Heimskringla* and *Gesta Danorum* the gods are described as historical persons (even though they descend from giants and sorcerers in *Gesta Danorum*), and their worship is nothing but a pagan misunderstanding, as, for example, the worship of Halfdanus in *Gesta Danorum* and Óðinn in *Heimskringla*. According to Saxo, it was, indeed, not only the Scandinavian pagans who made this mistake, but the Romans were also prone to this misunderstanding (*Saxo* 2015: I, v. 6). In both *Heimskringla* and *Gesta Danorum* the theory of euhemerism is followed to its logical consequences: the euhemerized gods die one after the other, a fact that underlines their mortality and lack of divinity. Frigga, Ollerus, Mithothyn, Balderus, Høtherus and Bous all die. But Saxo is not alone in letting the pagan gods expire on the parchment; in the first chapters of *Ynglinga saga* several gods die: Óðinn, Njǫrðr and Freyr, until only Freyja remains alive.

Othinus — Patron of the Danes

Contrary to Old Icelandic texts such as *Heimskringla* and Snorri's *Edda*, where we see examples of the learned prehistory, Saxo claims that the Danish kingdom is autochthonous (Mortensen 1987: 172–73). Consequently, Othinus and his fellow gods are not said to have migrated to the North, and Othinus is not the progenitor of kings or powerful men, as is the case in *Ynglinga saga*. Othinus nevertheless plays an important part as a patron of the Danish kings (as in the stories of Haddingus, Iarmericus, Haraldus Hyldetan and Sywardus). According to Saxo (*Saxo* 2015: I, viii. 10.14: 588–89), Othinus always nurtured the Danes with a paternal love (*quos paterna semper pietate coluerat*), which is no surprise considering the fact that Saxo wrote a history of the Danes on a grand scale. Sometimes, however, Othinus works against the Danish kings and heroes (as in the story of Balderus and Høtherus and that of Hagbarthus). In the various narratives there are several examples of this, even though Saxo shows that sometimes the pagan help of Othinus is evil and useless for the kingdom — as one would anticipate from a Christian point of view insofar as he is a pagan god. In historical times, Othinus never clashes with Danish Christian kings, as is, for example, the case in the great sagas about the two Óláfrs, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr inn helgi 'the Saint' Haraldsson (see Chapter 2.1.3 above). Saxo portrays

Óðinn in much the same way as is done in the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*. From time to time Óðinn influences the heroes' destinies, causing death or victory in battle. The matter and the characters of the *fornaldarsögur* and *Gesta Danorum* coincide in several instances, among other reasons because Saxo, as mentioned, used Icelandic sources and informants, while gathering material for his history of the Danish kings. Therefore, the similarity is not surprising. The figure of Óðinn, of course, varies from *fornaldarsaga* to *fornaldarsaga*, and besides the *fornaldarsögur* Saxo used a variety of other sources. But we nonetheless find a consistent representation of Othinus throughout the many narratives of Saxo's work, among other things because Saxo shaped his sources to demonstrate the grandeur of the Danish kingdom (Friis-Jensen 2000: 261). Contrary to the mortal gods mentioned above, Othinus lives for several generations and centuries until he almost fades away in the eighth book before the conversion to Christianity.

The long life of Othinus may be due to the fact that Saxo was able to fit many *fornaldarsaga*-like stories into one long chronological narrative. It has been suggested that Óðinn's unnaturally long life is a breach of the euhemeristic narrative pattern insofar as it implies that Óðinn has demonic features (Friis-Jensen 1993: 225). But the patriarchs of the Old Testament, which was considered historical in the Middle Ages, also lived for several hundreds of years, so this point is not inconsistent with euhemerism. The writer of *Heimskringla* chose not to face this challenge. He lets the pagan gods die early in the narrative, and they do not appear again and again. Óðinn does, however, appear once after his own death in *Heimskringla*. When Óláfr Tryggvason is at Ögvaldsnes, Óðinn comes in the guise of a certain *Gestr* ('Guest') to tempt the king. Even though he almost succeeds in it, the king recognizes him as *Óðinn sá er heiðnir menn höfðu lengi á trúat* ('Oðinn, whom heathen men had believed in for a long time'; *ÍF* XXVI: 314). The appearance of Óðinn in this passage of *Heimskringla* is unique in its context, and no explanation is given there as to the nature of the Óðinn figure — appearing so many years after his death. It originates in Oddr Snorrason's saga about Óláfr Tryggvason where Óðinn is explicitly identified with a demon who has taken the shape of the evil Óðinn (see the analysis in Chapter 2.1.3 above; Lassen 2011: 140). In *Heimskringla*, the information about Óðinn's demonic nature has been omitted. Taken at face value in the context of *Heimskringla* as a whole, the Óðinn at Ögvaldsnes cannot have anything but a demonic nature, since he appears long after the human Óðinn's death.

Gods Disguised as Humans

As they appear in the *Gesta Danorum*, the pagan gods can be placed in two different groups. The first group consists of Thor, Othinus, Frigg and Freyr, who all possess magical abilities and trick humans into believing that they are gods. The second group consists of Høtherus and Thorkillus who are not said to be gods, have no magical abilities and are not worshipped as gods. They are, nonetheless, remodellings of Nordic gods: Hǫðr and Þórr.

In the eighth book, we recognize a number of names from the tale of Þórr's journey to Útgarða-Loki and his fight against Geirrøðr in Snorri's *Edda*, a work which Saxo cannot have known. Saxo must, however, have modelled his tale on a story similar to that of Snorri. But the story has a completely different function in *Gesta Danorum* than in Snorri's *Edda*, and Saxo uses Þórr in an interesting way. Saxo tells that the Danish king worships and invokes Utgarthilokus on a journey from Geruthus's farm.[3] Thorkillus is simply a human being, and is never identified as a pagan god or a human who lets himself be worshipped as such. Thorkillus's travel to Utgarthilokus is motivated by the old king who desires to know where he must go after death. The function of the narrative is to reveal the true nature of paganism.[4] As Thorkillus and his men find the stinking and chained Utgarthilokus and pull out one of his beard hairs as proof that they have been there, snakes start to pour down over them, spewing their poison. The men call upon different gods, but not until Thorkillus calls upon the god of the entire world, that is, the Christian God, are they able to return to a safer place, that is, to Saxland, which has been Christianized. Here Thorkillus learns about the new religion and is baptized. It is surprising that Saxo uses a figure — who without question is based on the Norse god Þórr — to mark the turning point from which the Danes begin to abandon paganism and convert to Christianity. When Thorkillus calls upon the god of the entire world, he has not yet learned about Christianity. Thus, in this passage we see a pagan god who is not only euhemerized but even described as a noble heathen.[5] Several Icelandic sagas describe Þórr as an adversary of Christianity, as in *Flóamanna saga* (Finnur Jónsson 1932: 32–38) and *Brennu-Njáls saga* (*ÍF* XII: 265). But

[3] For a discussion of the apocalyptic elements in this story, see Malm 1992.

[4] This may be said to be reminiscent of the function of Þorr's travel to Útgarða-Loki in Snorri's *Edda*, insofar as it functions as a mirror of the larger narrative of the Asians' deception of the Swedish king.

[5] For a discussion of the 'noble heathen' and the definition of this term, see Chapter 2.2.4 below.

in the guise of Thorkillus, Saxo uses Þórr in an opposite and quite positive way, surprisingly, as the first person to convert to Christianity in Danish history. I have no knowledge of a similar reception or use of Þórr or other pagan gods in any other medieval text. Still, in the strife between Balderus and Høtherus in the third book of the *Gesta Danorum*, Saxo's description and use of Høtherus is to some extent reminiscent of the Thorkillus narrative. In Snorri's *Edda*, Hǫðr is the rather passive slayer of Baldr. In the *Gesta Danorum*, he is the first human to revolt against the pagan gods; he is the leader of an impressive battle against the unjust gods.

Sympathy and Polemics

Gesta Danorum is renowned for its polemical attitude in comparison to Icelandic works like *Ynglinga saga* and Snorri's *Edda*. But the use of Þórr and Hǫðr in the passages discussed above testifies to a sympathetic attitude to the pagan past. Saxo, however, sometimes includes polemical comments on the faults and imperfections of the pagan gods, as in the narrative of Balderus and Høtherus, when Othinus has to take counsel of a soothsayer (*Saxo* 2015: I, iii. 4. 1: 162–63):

> At Othinus, quamquam deorum precipuus haberetur, diuinos tamen et aruspices ceterosque, quos exquisitis prescientie studiis uigere compererat, super exequenda filii ultione sollicitat. Plerunque enim humane opis indiga est imperfecta diuinitas.
>
> (Now although Odin was regarded as chief among the gods, he would approach seers, soothsayers and others whom he had discovered strong in the finest arts of prediction, with a view to prosecuting vengeance for his son. Divinity is not always so perfect that it can dispense with human aid.)

When Othinus has raped Rinda, Saxo comments (*Saxo* 2015: I, iii. 4.9: 168–69) that the other gods realise that *At dii [...] Othinum uariis maiestatis detrimentis diuinitatis gloriam maculasse cernentes collegio suo submouendum duxerunt* ('Odin had tarnished the honour of his divinity by these various lapses from dignity and reckoned he should quit their fraternity'). Saxo does generally give more comments on the narratives, and he reveals his opinion more often than we can observe anywhere else in the Icelandic sagas or Eddas. Icelandic saga writers most often keep their opinions to themselves.

Idolatry[6]

In historiographic texts descriptions of pagan rituals are found more often than in Snorri's *Edda* and the eddic poems. In some sagas we read that the people of Norway, Sweden and even Iceland worshipped wooden statues of, for example, Þórr and Freyr.[7] In *Heimskringla*, the *Þrændir* ('People of Trøndelag') insist that Óláfr Tryggvason should sacrifice to the pagan gods, as their kings had previously done. The Christian king enters a temple, where a statue of Þórr, decorated with gold and silver, is placed. He knocks it over, and his men then destroy all the other statues in the temple, while his men outside kill the leader of the pagans. The king allows the pagans to choose whether they will fight or be converted; having lost their leader, they choose the latter option (*ÍF* XXVI: 317–18). King Óláfr the Saint also encounters Norwegian idolators. Most famous is Dala-Guðbrandr.[8] Dala-Guðbrandr has heard that Óláfr destroys temples and idols as part of his Christian mission, and he plans to scare the king with his statue of Þórr, decorated with gold and silver (*ÍF* XXVII: 184). However, the king tricks the pagans into looking towards the rising sun and as soon as they look away he chops the statue to pieces. Out from the inside of the statue come mice and snakes. At the end of the narrative, the scared pagans are baptized, and the king allows them to give the gold and silver on the statue to their wives. Thus, we learn, that the wives of pagans are greedy for gold — while a true god is not. Another famous example of idolatry in a historiographic work is found in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts ok Gunnars helmings*, where the worship of a wooden statue of Frey in Sweden is described.[9] In a final battle against the wooden statue, Gunnarr overcomes it with the miraculous help of Óláfr, and so he can return to Norway as a good Christian (*ÍF* IX: 99–115).

In the *Gesta Danorum*, idolatry finds its most vivid description in the fourteenth book, in the account of the idols Svantevitus and Rygevitus in connection with the crusade of the Danish king in Rügen (*Saxo* 2015: II, xiv. 39: 1272–1313; cf. Lassen 2010). Svantevitus, it should be mentioned in passing is — indeed — a statue of St Vitus of Corvey (*Saxo* 2015: II, xiv. 39.13: 1282–85; cf. Janson 2004). This account is in complete accordance

[6] See also Chapter 2.1.3 above on Demonism.

[7] C.f. e.g. *Heimskringla*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, *Njáls saga* and *Fljótsdæla saga*.

[8] Theodore Andersson (1988) has demonstrated that the narrative about Dala-Guðbrandr is based upon Christian sources.

[9] This narrative is analysed in greater detail in Chapter 2.1.3, as an example of demonic magic defeated.

with the theory of idolatry and is reminiscent of the examples from Old Norse historiography mentioned above. The first time we encounter a statue or an idol of a god is in the first book, when a statue of Othinus is decorated with gold to the subject's great satisfaction. The statue is made in his honour, but instead it leads to his degradation. The statue of Othinus is not attacked by Christian missionaries, as the story is set long before the conversion; more humiliatingly, it is attacked by his wife Frigga, who is unable to control her own lust for gold. Frigga greedily prostitutes herself to make one of her servants take down the statue to get hold of the golden arm rings. The gold is then melted down in order to produce jewellery for Frigga to wear. In Saxo's narrative, the statue leads to the degradation of Othinus who goes into voluntary exile.

This story demonstrates the divine imperfection of the pagan gods. The narrative about the exile of Othinus further functions as an illustration of one of the theological points made by Lactantius, where he argues that, by means of their idolatry, pagans worship dead or absent gods (cf. Lassen 2011: 217–18). An absent god is, according to Lactantius, an absurdity. A true god cannot be absent; he will always be divine and omnipresent wherever he is in the world (Brandt and Laubmann 1890: II, ii, 5). The desecration of the statue, as well as the exile of Othinus and his greedy whore of a wife, demonstrate Othinus's false status as a god. When Othinus has gone into exile, another false god, Mithothin, takes his place, and is in turn killed by Othinus upon his return. The rape of Rinda in the third book likewise forces Othinus into exile, but this time it is involuntary. The fact that the pagan gods can mutiny and be dethroned by other gods shows, according to Lactantius, that they are false gods. If one god can take another's place, yet another god can do the same. Of course, a true God cannot mutiny or be degraded (cf. Brandt and Laubmann 1890: I, xi). The death and mortality of the euhemerized pagan gods are presented as historical fact in both the *Gesta Danorum* and *Ynglinga saga*, but at the same time their function is to emphasize the absurdity of worshipping powerful men as gods. This is true both for *Gesta Danorum* and the less verbose and less explicit *Heimskringla*.

Behind medieval historiography lies a range of theories about the nature of paganism, all of which are easily fitted into an historical context and can easily be shaped in accordance with the nationality and scope of the various works. The obvious choice for a historiographer is, as mentioned above, euhemerism, but within the overall framework of euhemerism, idolatry, demonology and natural Christianity can be (and often are) fitted in. By narrating the history of pagan peoples and giving examples of their pagan worship, historiographers aimed to demonstrate the limited understanding of pagans — contrary to the-

ologians and Church Fathers (and even Snorri Sturluson in the Prologue to his *Edda*), who wanted to explain and unfold the nature of paganism. Historians did not write their works of history in order to tell the history of paganism itself, but in their national histories, describing the origin of a people, they would have to broach the subject of the religion of their ancestors before the conversion to Christianity. This was done in accordance with the teachings of the Church. In a letter to Saint Boniface (*c.* 675–754), Daniel of Winchester (d. *c.* 745) argues that to make pagans re-evaluate their pagan gods, a missionary should not argue directly against them. Instead, he should make it clear that the pagan gods were originally humans, and that they, therefore, are not eternal. If they are not eternal, then someone must have created them. The missionary should argue against paganism in a balanced and unpolemical way; only after that should he draw a parallel with Christian teachings (Haddan and Stubbs 1869–73: III, 304–06). Historiography, of course, obeys other rules than theological teachings. But we can, nonetheless, observe a similar method to the one Daniel describes. There exists no doubt about the Christian position of the writers, but they still unfold the paganism of their forefathers — with all its absurdities (from a Christian point of view) — in a balanced way while, at the same time, the superiority of Christian belief is for them unquestionable.

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2.2.4 – The Reception in Saga Literature

Margaret Clunies Ross

The Old Norse noun *saga* ('something said') refers to any kind of story, but, as a literary term, is used of a new vernacular genre of written text in prose that evolved during the late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries, largely in Iceland. That genre presumably grew from oral roots and often incorporated poetry said to have been composed in earlier times. There were several different kinds of sagas, some of whose names are attested from medieval sources, others bearing names given in modern times. This chapter will focus on two subgenres of the Icelandic saga, the sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) or family sagas and the *fornaldarsögur* ('sagas of the old time'), sometimes known as mythical-heroic sagas. The treatment of pre-Christian religion and myth in the important subgenre of *konungasögur* ('sagas of kings') and other historical writings is discussed by Annette Lassen in Chapter 2.2.3 above. In addition, some aspects of the subject are treated by Ármann Jakobsson in Chapter 2.1.4.

Both sagas of Icelanders and *fornaldarsögur* deal with Scandinavian societies of a past age, and their authors are thus drawn into imagining what everyday life in pre-Christian societies was like, seen always from the perspective of

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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medieval Christians. While all the chief theoretical explanations of paganism discussed in previous chapters can be detected in this literature in one place or another, some explanations are much more common than others in particular subgenres. The reasons for the saga authors' choices of perspective will be considered here.

The group of sagas set furthest back in time is the *fornaldarsögur*. They are supposed to have taken place in the age before the conversion to Christianity, and their protagonists are non-Christians, although some of their longer-lived characters, like Qrvar-Oddr and Norna-Gestr, are said to have come into contact with Christianity during their travels in foreign lands. The main geographical setting of *fornaldarsögur* is in Scandinavia, though not in Iceland, as the settlement of that island was understood to have taken place later than the chronological boundary that the *fornaldarsaga* world allowed. That chronological boundary roughly coincides with the time of conversion to Christianity in Norway and Iceland, nominally *c.* 1000. Norway and Sweden, sometimes Denmark, in the pre-conversion age are the commonest settings, though the heroes of these sagas frequently venture abroad to more exotic locations, like the British Isles, including Ireland and Orkney (e.g., *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*, 'The Saga of Friðþjófr the Bold'), Saxland (Saxony, north Germany), the central European plain (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 'The Saga of Hervǫr and Heiðrekr') and the northern realms of Finnmǫrk (Northern Norway) and Bjarmaland (Land of the Permians, in the region of the Kola peninsula in modern Russia (e.g., *Qrvar-Odds saga*, 'The Saga of Arrow-Oddr'; *Ketils saga hængs*, 'The Saga of Ketill Salmon'). These exotic regions are presented as the homes of all kinds of monsters and magicians, whom the saga heroes encounter and vanquish.

The medieval Icelandic authors of a number of *fornaldarsögur* often claim their heroes as ancestors of Icelanders and other historical people of a later age. Thus the end of *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* ('The Saga of Hálfr and the Hálfr Champions') looks forward to the important role two descendants of the Norwegian Viking king Hálfr played in the settlement of Iceland. Similarly, a group of *fornaldarsögur*, the sagas of the so-called Hrafnistumenn, from the fact that their heroes are all said to come from the island of Hrafnista (Modern Norwegian Ramsta) off the coast of Namdalen, are closely associated with several important Icelanders of the age of settlement. In this case, there are also thematic links and comparable character traits discernable between the *fornaldarsaga* heroes and their *Íslendingasaga* descendants, as we see in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* ('The Saga of Egill, Son of Skallagrímr'), where the connection between the men of Hrafnista and Egill's paternal line is mentioned (*ÍF* II: 3). A much discussed passage in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* ('The Saga of Þorgils

and Hafliði'), about entertainments at an Icelandic wedding in the early twelfth century, mentions the fact that some Icelanders claim descent from legendary heroes (the example given is Hrómundr Gripsson, whose medieval saga has not survived, though some *ríma* poetry about him has), but that other people doubt the veracity of such connections (Brown 1952: 17–18; McGrew and Thomas 1974: 43–44). This passage, which also gives, as the opinion of the Norwegian king Sverrir, that such *lygisǫgur* ('lying sagas') are the most entertaining, indicates that a range of attitudes towards the representation of the world of past heroes existed in medieval Iceland and Norway, ranging from King Sverrir's amused scepticism to a naive acceptance of its truthfulness.

The kind of world depicted in *fornaldarsögur* matches the kind of world that medieval theorists imagined as prevailing in a time before Christianity had exerted its shaping influence upon human society, when the tyrannical rule of demons and the practice of harmful magic had not yet been countered by the forces of the Christian God. The prevalence of paranormal beings and events in *fornaldarsögur* is another indication of these narratives' chronological setting at a time when Scandinavia was still pagan. Before the powers of Christendom could eradicate the dangerous illusions and manifestations of Satan, these devilish forces had free rein. They are thus numerous and varied in nature in these sagas.

In a typical *fornaldarasaga* these subjects are not treated in a heavy-handed, moralizing way but rather lightly. This does not, however, disguise the fact that a particular kind of reception of the pre-Christian age is being followed, one in accordance with Christian notions of demonic magic. The narratives do not really distinguish between the marvellous and the everyday, but accept the normality (for the time, as imagined from the perspective of a later age) of the events recounted and the characters depicted, extraordinary as many of them are. A resumé of the plot of a short *fornaldarsaga*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ('The Saga of Grímr Hairy-Cheek'), will give a good idea of the nature of the pre-Christian world depicted in this literary genre.

Gríms saga loðinkinna continues the family history of the Hrafnistumaðr Ketill hœngr 'Salmon', who is also the subject of a *fornaldarsaga*, by recounting the adventures of his son, Grímr. Grímr's mother was the giantess-like Hrafnhildr, daughter of a Sámi man named Brúni. According to the saga, Grímr has travelled north to a place named Gandvík, 'Inlet of Magic' (an inlet in the White Sea), during a famine to hunt for food and has seen that there is plenty of fish and game to catch there, though, shortly after he arrives, it suddenly disappears. He then encounters two hostile troll-women, Feima and Kleima, and engages in a *senna* ('flyting') with them. It emerges from this that their father,

Hrímnir, has caused the fish to disappear by means of sorcery. Later, after Grímr has killed the troll-women and their parents, he finds not only a whale stranded on the shore there but one in every bay. Furthermore the giant Hrímnir turns out to be the brother of the wicked stepmother of Grímr's fiancée Lopthœna, who has put an evil spell on her, causing her to disappear mysteriously. In a later episode, Grímr and his supporters kill a berserk, Sørkvir, and his eleven berserk companions in an encounter to which Sørkvir challenges Grímr after Grímr's twelve-year-old daughter Brynhildr has refused to marry him. Common ingredients of the *fornaldarsaga* genre are evident here: a setting in northern parts, where Sámi magicians, troll-women, and berserks roam freely; fish produced or concealed by sorcery; and individuals mysteriously disappearing. Grímr, like other heroes of the genre, is able to triumph over these hostile forces through his possession of some magic weapons, a set of arrows inherited from his father Ketill, the *Gúsisnautar* ('Gúsir's gifts'), which Ketill acquired after he had killed the Sámi king Gúsir.

Even though many *fornaldarsögur* represent paranormal events as almost run-of-the-mill, their authors often take the opportunity to describe pagan rituals and their practitioners in a bad light. In such cases the individuals associated with pagan temples and the actual observances of pagan religion are almost always represented as unequivocally evil, and their beliefs and actions are implicitly or explicitly contrasted with those of Christianity (cf. Lassen 2009; 2011: 176–77). This tendency is especially pronounced in younger manuscripts of *fornaldarsögur*. The sagas' heroes, however, either avoid any specific connection with pagan worship and idolatry or express scepticism towards the pre-Christian religion, in a manner similar to the depiction of virtuous characters in sagas of Icelanders who lived before the *siðaskipti*.

In *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, the hero, who has been exposed to Christianity on his travels in southern Europe, embarks on an expedition to a region called Bjálkaland. The rulers of this land, Álfr and his wife Gyða (or Gyðja, 'priestess'), are not only pagans but sorcerers and actively engaged in heathen cults at a *hof* or 'temple': *þau eru fjölkunnig, svá at þau lima saman stóð ok stjörnur* ('they are skilled in magic arts, so that they can stick together a stud of horses and the stars') (Boer 1888: 171). Oddr and his companions engage in battle with the pagans but are confused by the latter's use of sorcery and visual illusions. Oddr eventually sets fire to the pagan temples and shrines and kills the sorcerous pair in brutal fashion. A number of stanzas that form part of the narrative underline the most heinous aspects of pagan worship and the hero's implicitly Christian stance: the institutions of *hof* ('temples') and *hǫrg* ('sanctuaries') are repugnant to him, while the worship of many *trégoð* ('wooden [images of] gods') is con-

trasted with his expressed belief in a single deity. At one point Oddr is made to say *troll eigi þik*, | *trúi ek guði einum* ('may trolls have you, I believe in one god') (ÖrvOdd Lv 27/7–8 (*Örv* 62), *SkP* VIII: II, 877). Equivocally, however, he also acknowledges the help of his own magical aids, three arrows he has inherited, the Gusisnautar,[10] which ultimately come from a Sámi king, and a set of stone arrows that have been given him by a mysterious old man, who calls himself Jólfr.[11] Although this figure is never directly identified in the saga text, there is no doubt that he is intended as a version of the god Óðinn. Thus there is a certain irony in Oddr's situation, saved by his implicitly right-thinking pseudo-Christian beliefs on the one hand, and by his reliance on magical weapons given him by a Sámi and an undercover pre-Christian god on the other.

Another example of a *fornaldarsaga* that depicts characters engaged in pagan worship is *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* ('The Saga of Friðþjófr the Bold'). Here some of the action takes place at a sanctuary, Baldrshagi ('Baldr's pasture'), dedicated to the god Baldr. The hero, Friðþjófr, is alleged by his enemies, two brothers named Helgi and Hálfdan, to have breached the sanctity of the place by paying court there to their sister Ingibjörg, who is in love with Friðþjófr. After being banished to Orkney as a punishment for this supposed desecration, Friðþjófr returns to Norway and finds that the brothers have burnt down his family farm and married off their sister to another man. In retaliation, Friðþjófr burns down Baldrshagi, having come upon the brothers and their wives in the *hof*, engaged in sacrifice (*blót*), which involves handling wooden icons of the pagan gods. In this case there is less demonization of the heathens (though Helgi is said to be a sorcerer, who tries to drown Friðþjófr and his men on their way to Orkney) and more pseudo-antiquarian description of the cult of a god, Baldr, which has not left any trace in the research record (cf. Lindow 1997: 29 n., 132–33).

In many respects the authors of *fornaldarsögur* share a similar perspective on their subject matter to the one we find in historical writings and Saxo Grammaticus's Danish history (see Chapter 2.2.3 above), the latter of which draws on a good deal of the same legendary material. Here also we find shadowy, euhemerized versions of the old gods, especially Óðinn, like the Jólfr of *Qrvar-Odds saga* or the Vǫlsungr in *Vǫlsunga saga* ('The Saga of the Volsungs'),

[10] The Gusisnautar, as mentioned earlier, were obtained by Ketill hœngr, who is represented in the saga as an ancestor of Qrvar-Oddr.

[11] The phrase *Jólfs smiði* ('Jólfr's handiwork') is found in a list of arrow-*heiti* (Þul *Örvar* 2/5, *SkP* III: II, 820).

who is the eponym of the Volsung dynasty, still inhabiting the prehistoric world and influencing its activities (cf. Lassen 2011: 155–59, 168–71). The main difference between Saxo and *fornaldarsögur* is that Saxo's treatment of his material is overtly moralizing, while that of *fornaldarsaga* authors is usually covertly so, although it is not difficult (as in the example of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* given above) to detect standard medieval Christian attitudes towards paganism, and towards the heroes of the *siðaskipti*, like Oddr, who live righteous lives without the advantage of revealed Christian faith (see the discussion below on the theme of the 'noble pagan'). The *fornaldarsaga* authors' strongest criticisms of Norse paganism are directed at active pagan worship and idolatry involving the cults of the pre-Christian Norse gods.

The world represented in sagas of Icelanders lies chronologically on either side and in the middle of the *siðaskipti*, that change in custom that resulted from the introduction of Christianity into Scandinavia. Because Iceland was settled during the late ninth century and the first decades of the tenth (*c*. 870–930), most sagas of Icelanders are set in the century before the conversion and in the period immediately after it. Some, like *Njáls saga* ('The Saga of Njáll'), celebrate the conversion at its mid-point; others, like *Víga-Glúms saga* ('The Saga of Killer-Glúmr'), allow for its advent at the very end of the narrative. Wherever the conversion is situated chronologically, however, sagas of Icelanders represent their characters as behaving in accordance with modes of thought and action that medieval Christians attributed to their pre-Christian ancestors. In this respect this subgenre of the saga is similar to the *fornaldarsaga*, in that comparable strategies are used to avoid showing praiseworthy characters as active participants in pre-Christian rites while associating evil or weak characters with some aspect of sorcery or paganism. However, there are notable exceptions to this general rule; a significant number of the protagonists of some of the most famous sagas of Icelanders, like *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* ('The Saga of Hrafnkell, Priest of Freyr') and *Víga-Glúms saga*, are associated, directly or indirectly, with belief in one of the pre-Christian gods and activities associated with his cult.

The world of the sagas of Icelanders reveals its pre-Christian status in many ways, by no means all of which are represented in a pejorative light. It is a world in which the earliest settlers carry icons of their old gods to the new land by physically transporting numinous high-seat pillars or consecrated earth from the old family *hof* to a new location in Iceland (cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 122–57). The first settler generations establish cult houses for the old gods in Iceland and carry out sacrifices (*blót*); some people, particularly old women and scoundrels of the male gender, perform sorcery to harm others, and there are many

instances in which individuals with prophetic powers foresee the fates of other individuals or families, prophecies that for the most part are shown to come true. Saga characters are represented as believing in the heritability of good or bad luck from one generation to the next, particularly when it is embodied in special or magical weapons or other talismans, a motif we also find in *fornaldarsögur*.[12] While it is also true that many of these pre-Christian practices are only lightly sketched in sagas narratives, the general picture is of a society not yet in possession of the Christian faith nor behaving according to Christian mores. In respect of the latter, however, most saga writers appear to adopt a neutral stance on customary behaviour, including the conduct of feuds, which is the subject of many saga narratives. Feuding is not represented as incompatible with Christian ethics, although in some cases, such as *Njáls saga*, reconciliation and compassion are presented as a better way of resolving disputes in the post-conversion age.

As with the *fornaldarsögur*, the writers of sagas of Icelanders had to secure their audiences' sympathy for the narratives' protagonists while at the same time providing verisimilitude, as they understood it, as far as the pre-Christian environment was concerned. They had several strategies for doing this, but the most common was to represent particular characters as a kind of 'noble heathen'. This phrase was coined by Lars Lönnroth (1969) and it is worth reproducing his definition of the term here:

> It is characteristic of this theme that a pagan hero is shown in a situation where he appears to be a sort of precursor, or herald, of Christianity, at the same time retaining enough of the pagan ethics to emphasize the difference between the old and the new religion. It is, however, essential to the theme that the hero should never have been in close contact with the Christian faith — it is primarily his natural nobility, in combination with his good sense, and a half-mystical insight into the workings of nature, that makes him act as if he were already on the verge of conversion. (Lönnroth 1969: 2)

Lönnroth rightly linked the thinking behind this theme to the same mind-set that led to the exposition in the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* of the argument from design: that those who had lost the name of God were nevertheless able to

[12] There are many examples of this theme, including the sword Grásíða in *Gísla saga* ('The Saga of Gísli'); the three gifts of cloak, sword and spear that Víga-Glúmr receives from his maternal grandfather saga in *Víga-Glúms saga*; and the sword Dragvandill that Egill Skallagrímsson had inherited indirectly from Grímr loðinkinni, according to *Egils saga* (*ÍF* II: 195; Fell 1975: 113). .

use their bodily senses to recognize that there was a single creator of the world. 'Noble pagans' in the sagas frequently call upon 'him who created the sun' and intuitively recognize the Christian design of the world and Christian ethics even though they live in pre-Christian times.

A good example of a saga writer's use of this theme is an episode of *Vatnsdœla saga* ('The Saga of the People of Vatnsdalr') that Lönnroth also mentions in his article. It concerns the 'noble heathen' Þorsteinn Ingimundarson who calls upon *þann, er sólina hefir skapat* ('the one who has created the sun') both to free his brother Þórir from berserk fits (in return for the latter promising to confer the office of chieftain upon Þorsteinn's sons) and to help him bring up a child, the son of another relative by a concubine, who has been put out in the open to die on the orders of the man's wife. This, Þorsteinn avers, is a wicked thing to do (*er þat illa gört*). He foresees that *sá, er skapat hefir manninn* ('he who has created mankind') will one day turn this child to himself, a prophecy that is fulfilled at the end of the saga, when the child, now grown up, is among the first Icelandic converts to Christianity. The author of *Vatnsdœla saga* is very likely to have known that one of the three customs that were eventually abandoned shortly after the Icelanders adopted Christianity was the exposure of unwanted babies.[13] Hence, in this episode (*ÍF* VIII: 97–98; Wawn 1997: 49), Þorsteinn comes to understand the unacceptable nature of this practice intuitively in such a way that it confirms his status as a 'noble pagan'.

Another authorial strategy used by writers of both *fornaldarsögur* and sagas of Icelanders to protect their protagonists from close involvement with paganism, even though they are represented as living in a clearly pagan society, is to mention certain pre-Christian rites, like the *dísablót* ('sacrifice to the *dísir*', female household spirits) at the festival of the winter nights (*at vetrnóttum*), as being conventional and obligatory for most people, but then to state that the protagonist did not involve himself in them. In *Gísla saga*, for example, it is said that Gísli will not participate in these rites, because he *lét af blótum síðan hann var í Vébjǫrgum í Danmǫrku* ('no longer sacrificed since his stay at Viborg in

[13] See the account in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* 'The Book of the Icelanders' (*ÍF* I.1: 17): *en of barnaútburð skyldu standa en fornu lǫg ok of hrossakjǫtsát. Skyldu menn blóta á laun, ef vildu, en varða fjǫrbaugsgarðr, ef váttum of kvæmi við. En síðarr fám vetrum vas sú heiðni af numin sem ǫnnur* ('but [immediately after the conversion] the old laws should stand as regards the exposure of children and the eating of horse-flesh. People had the right to sacrifice in secret, if they wished, but it would be punishable by the lesser outlawry if witnesses were produced. And a few years later, these heathen provisions were abolished, like the others') (Grønlie 2006: 9, 25 n. 73).

Denmark') (*ÍF* VI: 36; Johnston 1963: 13). The implication is that Gísli had been influenced by the Christian condemnation of pagan sacrifice while he was in Denmark. In other instances no clear reason for this behaviour is given, but the implication is that the character realizes intuitively that he should not participate because the ritual is idolatrous. Alternatively, some characters are said not to believe in any god at all, but only in their own powers (*mátt sinn ok megin*) (Weber 1981). Although self-belief may not exactly conform to ideas of Christian humility and dependence on God, because it may suggest the individual's arrogance and pride, it may be seen as better than idolatry.

Another authorial strategy used by many saga writers to rehabilitate their protagonists in terms of their religious beliefs and actions is to have them convert to Christianity at the ends of their lives, lives during which they have been far from models of Christian humility and compassion. Thus in *Laxdœla saga* ('The Saga of the People of Salmon River Valley'), the chief female character, Guðrún Ósvifsdóttir, becomes the first nun in Iceland at the end of her long and eventful life: *Hon var fyrst nunna á Íslandi ok einsetukona* ('She was the first nun in Iceland and an anchoress') (*ÍF* V: 228). Even the duplicitous Víga-Glúmr accepts baptism when Christianity comes to Iceland and is said to have been confirmed during his last illness.[14] Alternatively, the saga's final chapters may record that, if the character died before Christianity came to Iceland, his descendants had his bones reburied near to consecrated ground. This was the case with Egill Skallagrímsson, who is said in his saga to have been dug up from the pagan burial mound (*haugr*) in which he had originally been laid and his bones moved and reburied on two occasions, the second to the outer edge of the churchyard at Mosfell, a location that shows recognition of his unbaptized status. The reported discovery of some huge bones and a thick, heavy skull, thought to have been Egill's, is narrated in a way that would be likely to remind the audience of the Christian cult of saints' relics (*ÍF* II: 298–99; Fell 1975: 170–71).

It was noted earlier in this chapter that a significant number of the protagonists of some of the most famous sagas of Icelanders are associated, directly or indirectly, with belief in one or other of the pre-Christian gods and in some cases with activities associated with their cults. Historical works like

[14] *En þá er kristni kom út hingat tók Glúmr skírn ok lifði þrjá vetr síðan ok var biskupaðr í banasótt af Kol biskupi ok andaðisk í hvítaváðum* ('But when Christianity came to Iceland, Glúmr received baptism and lived for three years after that and was confirmed during his final illness by Bishop Kol and died in the white robes of a convert') (Turville-Petre 1960: 51, 86, n. 51/14; McKinnell 1987: 131).

Landnámabók ('The Book of Settlements') also mention individuals and families who held religious office in the pre-Christian period. The term *hofgyðja* ('temple priestess') is used of several women in *Landnámabók*, and one of the most important settler families on the island was named the Freysgyðlingar, 'the little priests of Freyr' (cf. *ÍF* 1.2: 320–21, 397). While a number of saga writers associate their characters with the cult of Freyr (Turville-Petre 1935; Meulengracht Sørensen 1992), others associate their protagonists with Þórr or, in a few cases, with Óðinn (cf. Lassen 2011: 122–28). The interesting question for a study of the reception of the pre-Christian religion in sagas of Icelanders and other works of Icelandic history is: how did saga writers convey this information without falling foul of Church teachings about idolatry?

In an earlier study (Clunies Ross 1998: 164–73) I proposed that underlying the representation of much pre-Christian cultic activity in sagas of Icelanders is an ideology of family distinction in religious matters, which were almost always bound up with political power, so that 'the new religion of Christanity preserved the authority vested by the pagan deities and the *landvættir* "local spirits" in the descendants of individuals who were closest to them and cultivated them most assiduously under the old regime' (Clunies Ross 1998: 164). Thus, in this view the religious and socio-political distinction of individuals and families under the old custom continued and was confirmed under Christianity.

However, the treatment of all saga characters who are particularly associated with pagan cults cannot be explained in this way, nor are authorial attitudes towards such figures always benign. While saga writers generally maintained a poker face and an impersonal voice in their narratives, they developed a number of techniques whereby their own views or that of their fellow Icelanders could be conveyed indirectly. With regard to the presentation of pre-Christian cultic activities, the association between such descriptions and unsympathetic saga characters makes the authorial attitude very clear. A typical example is the character Þorgrímr nef ('Nose') in *Gísla saga*, described as soon as he is introduced into the saga as *fullr af gørningum ok fjǫlkynngi ok var seiðskratti*, *sem mestr mátti verða* ('full of sorcery and magic, and he was as great a wizard as could be') (*ÍF* VI: 37). With such an introduction, full of seriously critical and pejorative words, the audience could not but realize that this man was evil and his forging of a spear out of a piece of Gísli's family heirloom, the sword Grásíða, could not but bring misfortune to Gísli and his companions, as indeed it turns out.

There are other much more complex cases of saga characters who are shown to believe in pagan gods (or to cultivate a particular deity) and actively participate in cults or other activities associated with the pre-Christian religion,

and yet are not overtly condemned for their behaviour. The examples of Víga-Glúmr and Hrafnkell Freysgoði ('Priest of Freyr') are of such a kind. Neither saga presents its protagonist in terms similar to the description of Þorgrímr nef above. Hrafnkell is an overbearing, inflexible man who follows the cult of Freyr wherever it may lead.[15] This causes him to kill a young shepherd who has ridden his stallion, Freyfaxi ('Freyr's mane'), whom he had vowed to the god never to let anyone ride. The events that then unfold lead to a complex feud, the consequence of which is that Hrafnkell is outlawed from the district but manages to revive his fortunes elsewhere. His opponents make several errors of judgement that lead to their ultimate downfall, whereas Hrafnkell, having given up his worship of Freyr, is able to return to his former farm and end his days in prosperity.

The moral of this saga has seemed equivocal to many scholars, and there can be no doubt that Hrafnkell is not condemned out of hand by the saga writer, who presents him as a person with natural authority, whereas his chief opponent, Sámr, is not a leader of men and makes several mistakes in handling his rival that, it is suggested, a man endowed with natural authority would not make. At the same time a close connection is established in the narrative between Hrafnkell's high-handedness and his pursuit of the cult of Freyr, to the extent that the two appear to be linked. This was almost certainly a deliberate manoeuvre on the saga writer's part and designed to discredit Hrafnkell's idolatrous behaviour. At a point in the saga when Hrafnkell's enemies have thrown the horse Freyfaxi over a cliff and burnt his cult houses (*ÍF* XI: 123–24), Hrafnkell himself decides to give up the old faith: *Þá svarar Hrafnkell: 'Ek hygg þat hégóma at trúa á goð,' — ok sagðisk hann þaðan af aldri skyldu á goð trúa, ok þat efndi hann síðan, at hann blótaði aldri* ('Then Hrafnkell replies "I think it folly to believe in gods" — and he said he would never believe in gods and he acted afterwards so that he never sacrificed again') (*ÍF* XI: 124). Hrafnkell becomes a religious sceptic, not because he has accepted Christianity but because his old beliefs have been shown to be ineffective. In fact, there is no mention of any religious conversion in this saga. All is pragmatic and, though the pre-Christian religion is implicitly repudiated, nothing is put in its place.

[15] Near the beginning of his saga he is introduced thus: *Hrafnkell lét gera hof mikit. Hrafnkell elskaði eigi annat goð meir en Frey ok honum gaf hann alla ina beztu gripi sína hálfa við sik. …* [*hann*] *tók goðorð yfir* [*menn*]. *Við þetta var lengt nafn hans ok kallaðr Freysgoði ok var ójafnaðarmaðr mikill en menntr vel* 'Hrafnkell had a large temple built. Hrafnkell loved no other god more than Freyr and shared half of all his best valuables with him … [he] assumed the chieftainship over [men to whom he had granted land]. Because of that his name was lengthened and he was called 'Freyr's priest' and was a very overbearing man but very accomplished' (*ÍF* XI: 99).

The representation of pre-Christian religion in *Víga-Glúms saga* and the saga author's presentation of the main character, Víga-Glúmr ('Killer-Glúmr') Eyjólfsson, is even more complex than is the case with Hrafnkell. Nowhere is it stated directly that Glúmr is attached to any one god, and yet there is evidence in the text, for those who can recognize the clues, that his paternal ancestors had Freyr as their family god (Holtsmark 1933; Turville-Petre 1936). In spite of this Glúmr is shown to commit a killing on a field, Vitazgjafi 'Sure Giver', probably to be associated with the nearby temple of Freyr and thus under the god's protection (though this is never stated outright). The father of the man he has killed enters this temple leading an old ox, and calls upon Freyr to accept the ox as a sign that the god will drive Glúmr away from his farm at Þverá (Turville-Petre 1960: 17; McKinnell 1987: 72–73). The ox falls down dead, and the sacrificer feels that this is a sufficient sign (the word *jartegn*, often meaning 'a miracle', is used) that Freyr has heard his prayer, but the narrative is non-committal about whether or not it was the god's doing that the ox died. However, later Glúmr becomes aware through a dream that the god has turned against him because of this killing and because he has lied on oath about another killing he has carried out but not acknowledged.[16] The dream makes it clear to Glúmr that his association with Freyr is at an end: *Hann vaknaði, ok lézk Glúmr verr vera við Frey alla tíma síðan* ('He woke up — and Glum said his feelings for Frey were the worse ever afterwards') (Turville-Petre 1960: 46; McKinnell 1987: 121).

While Víga-Glúmr's paternal kin appear to have followed the cult of Freyr, there are indications in the saga that his mother's family favoured Óðinn. Again, there is no direct statement of this attachment in the saga, but the three gifts that Glúmr's maternal grandfather Vigfúss á Vors gave him, of cloak, sword and spear, especially the first and third of these, are strongly associated with Óðinn, and these gifts represent Glúmr's good luck, or *hamingja*, which keeps him from harm while he owns the talismans, but, when he gives them away after he has sworn the ambiguous oath, his luck deserts him. Glúmr's *hamingja* appears to him shortly after his grandfather's death in the form of an enormous woman whose shoulders touch the mountains. He recognizes that she has come to stay with him at his farm and that she has passed from Vigfúss to him as his personal *hamingja* (Turville-Petre 1960: 15; McKinnell 1987: 69–70).

[16] Technically he did not lie but used a form of words which was capable of being interpreted as either a positive or a negative statement; see McKinnell 1987: 119–20 and n. 3.

The narrative voice of *Víga-Glúms saga* does not offer an opinion on the nature of the Icelanders' beliefs in fate, the veracity of dreams or any other paranormal happenings that are reported in the saga. In that respect, this saga shares the perspective of many others, an agnostic view of the true causation that lies behind such events. This agnosticism could, if pressed (which it is usually not in these sagas), allow a Christian view of fate and God's providence that would override pre-Christian beliefs in specific indigenous agencies. Many studies of the role of dreams and similar phenomena in saga literature have confirmed how subtly these topics can develop the literary and ideological complexities of a saga narrative without committing the author to a particular stance towards them. Similarly, the inclusion of poetry in saga literature can function in the same way, to increase the complexity of the narrative and the portrayal of character without involving the main narrating voice itself.

This study of the presentation of pre-Christian religious topics in sagas of Icelanders shows that, on the whole, saga writers depicted the religious behaviour of their ancestors in a remarkably tolerant manner but developed various strategies of considerable literary complexity to present topics associated with the old gods and their cults so as to dissociate their own position, and that of their presumed audience, from the behaviour they depicted. This approach to the pre-Christian religion of their ancestors made it possible for those who wrote these sagas during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to compose narratives in which men and women of the pre-Christian age were their protagonists.

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Part 3
The Humanist Reception

3.1 – The Humanist Reception in Scandinavia

Mats Malm

The North had been attributed with various characteristics through antiquity and the Middle Ages. Sources such as Herodotus (fifth century BC), Tacitus (first century AD), Jordanes and Procopius (sixth century) and Paulus Diaconus (eighth century) described peoples of the North, under varying names and definitions — Scythians, Hyperboreans and others — and with varying degrees of fascination. Recurring characteristics of Northern peoples were said to be courage and contempt of death, as well as a simple and harsh life-style. The Scandinavian lands were usually portrayed as fertile and, despite their uncultivated customs, the people were often described as having a particular set of simple virtues (e.g. Grape 1949: 71–134). Historiographers of the Gothic rulers who took over the power of Rome would spread the idea that the Goths derived from Scandinavia, and in the eleventh century, Adam of Bremen presented his account of the fantastic heathen temple of Uppsala (see the discussion in Chapter 1.1).

Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* ('History of the Danes'), a tremendous asset to Danish nationalism, was carefully published for the first time in imposing editions in Paris in 1514 and in Basel in 1534. Saxo became the dominant source in Europe for information on Scandinavian pre-Christian religion and religious customs, but, while his history was filled with accounts of heathen myth and rite, they were scattered throughout the work, which aimed to create

Mats Malm is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Gothenburg. His main fields are early modern and medieval Scandinavian literature and culture, as modelled on the heritage of antiquity.

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a consistent chronographical history rather than an account of heathen religion and was adapted in diverse ways to Saxo's particular creation of the past. Swedish patriotism suffered greatly from the lack of a Saxo, especially as Swedes mentioned by Saxo were portrayed in an unfavourable way, but Swedish historians were to find ways of compensating for this.

Describing the golden temple of Uppsala and its three idols of Þórr, Óðinn and Fricco (often interpreted as Freyr or Frigga) representing weather/growth, fury and peace/pleasure respectively, the nine-year feasts and the savage sacrifice of animals as well as humans, Adam of Bremen had equated the first two deities with Roman Jupiter and Mars, while Fricco with his giant phallus appears to have found no Roman equivalent. Adam had explained that the Swedes also immortalized prominent humans, worshipping them as gods. His description was a double-edged substitute: while exotic and impressive, it did not exactly promote the idea of a cultivated and virtuous nation. The myth of the Æsir's immigration from Asia into Sweden was considerably more attractive, but it was not widely known until the publication of the first translated version of Snorri's *Heimskringla* by Mattis Størssøn in 1594. Access to the rich information about religion and mythology in the prose and poetic Eddas did not really commence until Peder Resen's editions of the redaction of *Snorra Edda* with *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál* in 1665.

When the German scholar Albert Krantz described the Northern Germanic nations in his *Chronica regnorum aquilonarium* ('Chronicle of the Nordic Kingdoms'), published in 1546, he located the famous tribes of Langobards in Denmark, Normans in Norway and Goths in Sweden. As Saxo was his primary source, Danish accomplishments were represented as more lavish than Swedish ones. Krantz did summarize Adam's account of the temple at Uppsala when introducing the section on Sweden, but, as his project was an historical chronicle, pre-Christian cultural habits and religion were very little discussed.

Early Swedish Historiography: The Magnus Brothers

In the state formation of the Renaissance, Humanist achievements were vital. Denmark and Sweden constantly challenged each other not only with war on the battlefield but also on the cultural field. Their goals were to establish their own vernacular as a high-standing language, their own culture on the whole as on a par with the great European cultures and, not least, to establish a national history that would lend honour to and legitimize their political ambitions. If the first priority in order to become a respectable member of learned Europe

was to be in command of Latin and the other grand languages, the second priority was to develop and extol the national vernacular language, history and culture. Historiography came first, while language studies were intensified in the seventeenth century. The scholars of the sixteenth century relied heavily on Latin sources, and, even though it has been demonstrated that already a scholar such as Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) was in good command of Old Norse (Akhøj Nielsen 2008), finding, treating and editing the sources of Old Norse culture and religion was a lengthy and difficult process. Both Danish and Swedish Humanists would be dependent on the aid of Icelanders, and only gradually would access to Old Norse sources improve.

The political value of Gothic prehistory to Denmark and Sweden was immense, and as a consequence, historiography, philology of the vernaculars and runology developed forcefully, not as a collaboration but as an intense competition. The glorious past of Denmark was presented to learned Europe by Saxo Grammaticus, but apart from general statements about the peoples of the North from antiquity onwards, Sweden's past had mainly been made known through Adam of Bremen's description of the Uppsala temple and the sacrifices there. Saxo echoed the description faintly (with a very different statue) by stressing the importance and abominations of the place, as well as Óðinn's preference for it. Spectacular as it might be, it did not really enhance respectability. So Swedish scholars more assiduously developed the notion of the Goths as a powerful people of the North, the account that Jordanes had given describing Theoderic's background in the sixth century. It was employed at the church council of Basel in 1434, when the Swedish delegate Nicolaus Ragvaldi (d. 1448) claimed that Sweden should have a more prominent place since the Swedes were the descendants of the mighty Goths who had even conquered Rome. This ancestral claim was made by others as well, not least by Spain and Denmark, but Sweden exploited the theme most energetically.

The themes of Upsalian religiosity and Gothic ancestry were merged by Ericus Olai (d. 1486), theologian and professor at Uppsala University. His *Historia Svecorum Gothorumque* ('History of the Swedes and Goths') became foundational for nationalistic Swedish historiography, fiercely maintaining the precedence of Sweden over its neighbours. Olai turns Adam's description of the heathen statues and rites into the most respectable exposé. He commences his work by describing a place in the middle of Gothia, that is, Suecia = Sweden, which was so delightful and splendid that it was made the capital of the kingdom as soon as the territory was inhabited after Noah's Flood: Uppsala. Admittedly, the abominations Adam relates did take place there, but the important thing, Ericus stresses, is that this was the centre of power and,

not least, that God chose this particular place to announce his truth to mankind. The place is expressly called a *locus amoenus*, a wonderful site connected to a long classical tradition, and it is lavishly described as precisely such a classic wonder of delight. This was the home of the Goths, and it was so by God's providence because, as soon as the Goths had the opportunity, they became the champions of the Catholic religion and of peace. Olai's chronicle was printed several times in Latin and Swedish during the seventeenth century but exerted a massive influence already from the time of its composition.

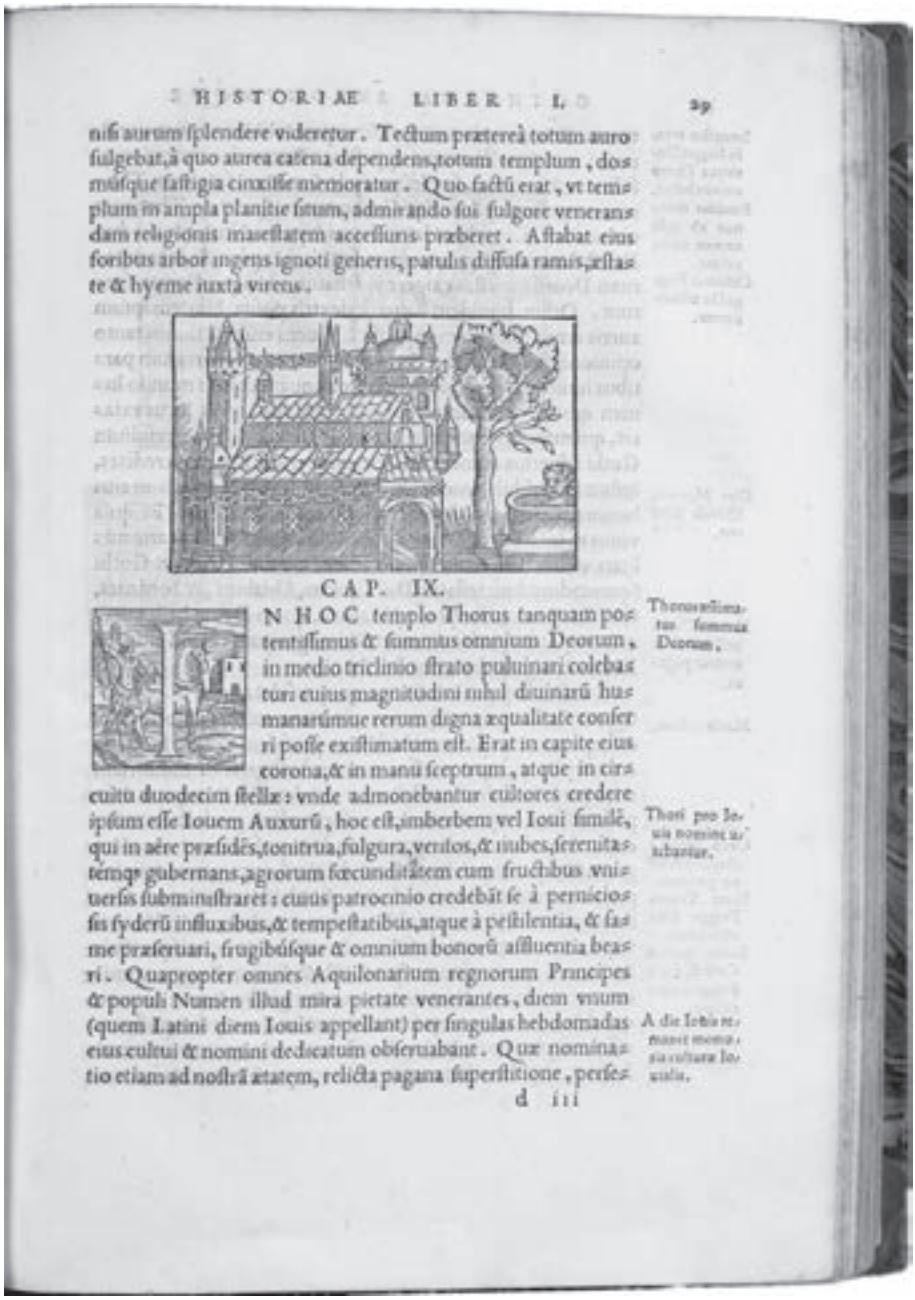
An exception to this line of historiographers was the reformer Olaus Petri (1493–1552), who in the 1540s wrote a remarkably detached chronicle of Sweden, *En swensk cröneka*. His view of history was not nationalistic but didactic: in order to learn from history, critical adherence to truth is of the essence (cf. Schmidt-Voges 2004: 114–29). Hence he dismisses practically all Swedish and Danish historiography as tendentious and unreliable. He does not deny that the Goths may have come from Sweden, but he sees nothing honourable about being related to such savage warriors. Petri also briefly relates Adam's description of the Uppsala temple with the statues of Þórr, Óðinn and Fricco, commenting on their Latin counterparts, and describing the sacrificial practices in the usual way. Connecting them with the names of week days, Petri concludes that as Latin Friday is the day of Venus, so Swedish Friday is named after the female deity Frigga, not a male Fricco. However, he carefully introduces the topic by describing how myths are to be interpreted as historical events, and giants and gods as historical persons, thus softening pre-Christian Swedish idolatry and sacrifice with an euhemeristic touch. Petri's critical sense made his work unappealing to Swedish historiographers of the following centuries, and it was not printed until 1818.

The glorious Swedish past was first efficiently conveyed to the world by Johannes Magnus, whose *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sveonumque regibus* ('History of All the Kings of the Goths and Swedes') was published in Rome in 1554. Johannes, decidedly anti-Danish, endeavoured especially to show that the powerful Goths not only came from the North but more specifically from Sweden. After the Flood, Noah had landed in the Caspian Mountains, and his sons and grandsons had colonized the world. Shem took Asia; Ham took Egypt and Africa; Japhet took Europe, and his son Magog came to control the Scandinavian peninsula, where his descendants were called Goths or Getae: the Swedes. The notion of the Flood, it might be underlined, postulates that the world was empty and in need of being populated again. Thus, as Johannes explains that the northern parts of Europe were more attractive, Sweden gains an entirely dominating position, populated 108 years before the Italic territory.

Among Magog's sons were the eponymous Suenno, Ubbo and Siggo, explaining the names Sueonia, Uppsala and Sigtuna. After thus connecting biblical and Scandinavian sources, Johannes offers an illustration of the *alphabeticum gothicum* ('Gothic alphabet'), the runes (Johannes Magnus 1554: 25), in order to ascertain that the heroic deeds of this people demanded diligent study of eloquence and writing, producing a cultivated civilization that flourished before that of Rome. As pointed out by Karen Skovgaard-Petersen (2008), while Saxo proposes that the culture of the old Danes would have been marvellous had they only been in command of Latin, Johannes proposes that the culture of the Swedish Goths was earlier and thus even surpassed Latin culture. As primary proof of this early literary culture, Johannes adduces the runestones, which 'were raised before, or just after, the Flood' (1554: 5–6) — as Noah arrived after the Flood, Johannes here actually hints that the Gothic golden age was underway even before Noah. The Swedes', or Goths', impact on the world was not simply a human achievement: it could be understood as God's will.

It was a more or less natural requirement for chroniclers to connect their own nation with authoritative cultures, especially Roman history or biblical history. By introducing Noah and Magog as ancestors of the Gothic–Swedish nation, Johannes Magnus achieved that authoritative historical connection. However, the religious aspect was of considerable importance here. The pre-Christian religion that Johannes describes is in essence Christian. Before introducing the Uppsala temple, he carefully explains that with Noah and Magog, a true divine cult had been introduced in the North. The Old Testament connection thus endorses, on the one hand, a history and developed culture older than those of Greece and Rome, and, on the other, an essentially Christian pre-Christian religion. After this golden age of true cult and indefatigable devotion of virtue, Johannes explains, divine knowledge was gradually corrupted and heathen idolatry emerged.

Johannes is detailed about the Goths' sacrifice of humans and delusions concerning gods, but he frames these pre-Christian customs in a sympathetic way: the people of the North are the direct result of God's benediction of Noah and his sons, and they retained high — even immense and indefatigable — virtues and religious piety until the time of Ericus, Magog's grandson. As the Goths neglected God, he answered by neglecting them and letting them fall into idolatry (Johannes Magnus 1554: 28). As this happened to all mankind, the Goths could still be described as the people who more than any other preserved the piety and wisdom of God (Johannesson 1991: 90). Johannes is also careful to point out, already in the preface, that when the Goths/Swedes were actually converted, they were firmer in their faith and customs than any other



HISTORIAE LIBER I. 29

nisi aurum splendere videretur. Tectum praterea totum auro fulgebat, à quo aurea catena dependens, totum templum, dos musque fastigia circuisse memoratur. Quo facto erat, vt templum in ampla planitie situm, admirando sui fulgore veneranda religionis maiestatem accessuris præberet. Astabat eius foribus arbor ingens ignoti generis, patulis diffusa ramis, æstate & hyeme iuxtà virens.

CAP. IX.

N HOC templo Thorus tanquam potentissimus & summus omnium Deorum, in medio triclinio strato puluinari colebatur: cuius magnitudini nihil diuinarũ humanarúmue rerum digna æqualitate conferri posse existimatum est. Erat in capite eius corona, & in manu sceptrum, atque in circuitu duodecim stellæ: vnde admonebantur cultores credere ipsum esse Iouem Auxurũ, hoc est, imberbem vel Ioui similẽ, qui in aere præsidẽs, tonitrua, fulgura, ventos, & nubes, serenitatemq; gubernans, agrorum fœcunditatem cum fructibus vniuersis subministraret: cuius patrocinio credebãt se à pernicios sis syderũ influxibus, & tempestatibus, atque à pestilentia, & fame præseruari, frugibúsque & omnium bonorũ affluentia beari. Quapropter omnes Aquilonarium regnorum Principes & populi Numen illud mira pietate venerantes, diem vnum (quem Latini diem Iouis appellant) per singulas hebdomadas eius cultui & nomini dedicatum obseruabant. Quæ nominatio etiam ad nostrã ætatem, relicta pagana superstitione, perse-

Thorus estimatus summus Deorum.

Thori pro Ioue nomine adorabatur.

A die Iouis retinent memoriã cultus Iouis.

d iii

Figure 3.1.1. The Uppsala temple according to Johannes Magnus's *Historia*, p. 29. Photograph courtesy of the University of Gothenburg Library.

nation. Significantly, Johannes adds that this has been so 'up until our unfortunate days' (1554: 6): from his Catholic perspective, the Reformation and Protestantism are understood as a kind of reversion into idolatry. Heathendom can thus be seen as the result of the breaking of the Old Covenant, remedied by the Christianization of Scandinavia corresponding to the New Covenant.

Johannes considers the option that heathen idolatry and sacrifice might be better passed over silently but concludes that more is to be learnt by describing them. Adam of Bremen's description of the temple of Uppsala was vital to Johannes's proposition that Uppsala was the centre of the old North. He was obviously attracted to its details, which were here even illustrated, as the monumental folio volume was lavishly decorated with images — but it had no mention of Adam, whose description Johannes probably only encountered indirectly. Thus Johannes expands on the description of the costly temple, with its roof of gold, encircled by the golden chain, with the figures of the three gods Þórr, Óðinn and Fricco-Frigga. He (as Olaus Petri less influentially did) translates them into Roman gods in accordance with Adam's account and not only removes the god Fricco's immense phallus but even turns him into a goddess, Frigga. Thus, Johannes expands Adam's gods into an image of what he considers the Nordic virtues of power, fortitude and love/fertility to be (Johannesson 1984: 389). While Frigga can be equated with Venus, he states, her idol is equipped with sword and bow, since not only men but also women of the North constantly practise warfare, so that their courage is not weakened by abundance and voluptuousness (1554: 30–31). As a consequence both of practices of virtue and of sacrifice, Johannes explains, the human victims were not sorry. He devotes the thirteenth chapter (referring to Herodotus) to explaining their contempt of death: they believed in the immortality of the soul: after death they would arrive at a more delightful place, *locus amænior*, where everything that was lacking in life was to be had (1554: 35–37). The deity in charge there he names Bleixen — none of the reliable Old Norse sources on pre-Christian religion were yet available. Referring to Saxo, Johannes also dwells on other gods and how, through sorcery, they deluded the simple-minded not only to sacrifice but even to human sacrifice in water and groves. The methods of delusion and claiming godly status involved manipulation and even the practice of selling people the status of gods, which, however, Johannes explains, are issues common to heathen idolatry also in Egypt, Greece and other lands (1554: 33–34).

Johannes's *Historia* was published posthumously by his brother Olaus. The year after the publication of that work, in 1555, Olaus Magnus published an even more influential work, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* ('History of the Northern Peoples') (see Balzamo 2015; Nilsson 2016). This was a kind of

cultural history, presenting the peoples of the North to the learned Latin community in an entirely new way. Here, too, the Danes were portrayed negatively, but although they were not to be considered true Goths, the work endowed the North as a whole with a mysterious, fascinating aura. As Olaus treated habits and customs rather than historical events, he noted anything that might attract the interest of his readers, and this includes a number of descriptions of customs (including superstitious notions of various kinds), language (the runic alphabet as corresponding to Egyptian hieroglyphs, each sign carrying a secret, symbolic meaning) and literature. Olaus thus repeated the description of the Uppsala temple (referring not to Adam but to his brother), developing it with much detail, parallels and observations on, for example, beliefs in the power of fairies, Saxo's description of how Hotherus meets witches and other episodes, very many of which touch upon pre-Christian religion and were designed to awaken the world's interest, but did not in themselves form topics that would be followed up as central themes in Humanist writings. Olaus's euhemeristic explanations involved more amazement over how people let themselves be fooled into worshipping what they thought to be gods, but he is careful to underline the deceits of the devil and demons, and to quote Augustine's *On the City of God* on how even the religions of antiquity worked in the same way. Tying pre-Christian religion to Christian religion was not part of his project as it was that of his brother.

Viewed together, the Magnus brothers established the idea of the Goths as a people blessed by God and, through Noah, cultivating an Old Testament religion before falling into heathendom. Once Christianized, they consequently served faith better than other nations — until the advent of Protestantism. Adam of Bremen's description was not flattering, but efficiently framed not only by the overarching Christian context but also by the presentation of the valorous mentality of the Goths.

Early Danish Historiographers

In Denmark, the works of the Magnus brothers aroused a more or less immediate response. In 1561 Hans Svaning's (1503–84) *Refutatio calumniarum cuiusdam Joannis Magni Gothi Upsaliensis* ('Refutation of the Calumnies Made by a Certain Johannes Magnus Gothus of Uppsala') was printed, together with the first part of a chronicle of the Danish regents which would eventually stretch from the eponymous king Dan to Christian I. To Svaning, the Danish nation took first place in the history of the North, and the mighty Goths were said to have spread over the world not only from Sweden but also from Denmark. The

strategically important southern part of today's Sweden, Scania (Skåne), was valuable also for historiographical reasons, because it was readily identifiable with Scandia, home of the Goths according to Jordanes. This prestigious area was the object of constant warfare, until it finally became Swedish in the 1658 peace of Roskilde.

By the turn of the seventeenth century, Arild Huitfeldt (1546–1609) had published an extensive history of Denmark, written in Danish, *Danmarks Riges Krønike* ('The Chronicle of the Kingdom of Denmark') (1595–1604). Huitfeldt, like Saxo and Svaning, began his history with the eponymous king Dan, suggesting an autochthonous and untouched Danish nation (Skovgaard-Petersen 2002: 112–16). Subsequent chroniclers, however, would instead connect pre-Christian religion to Christian religion. In 1622, Claus Christoffersen Lyschander published his *Danske Kongers Slectebog* ('Family-Book of the Danish Kings') not only with a Danish title but also, significantly, with a Latin title, *Synopsis historiarum Danicarum* ('A Synopsis of Danish History'). Lyschander drew a continuous line from the creation of the world, Adam and Eve, over the Flood and Noah's arrival in the northern parts of the world, via the foundation of the Danish empire by Noah's son Japhet and the flourishing of the Gothic and Cimbrian ancestors to the Danish king Christian IV. In this way, the state of Denmark appears as God's state on earth. As Skovgaard-Petersen (2002: 119) points out, Lyschander's vision of ancient Denmark, reminiscent of Johannes Magnus's Sweden, was not very influential, as it was written in Danish.

The most developed Danish answer to the Magnus brothers was Johannes Pontanus' *Rerum Danicarum historia* ('History of Danish Matters'), published in 1631 as an update to Saxo's history of the Danes. Skovgaard-Petersen has detailed how Pontanus, considerably more cautious than Johannes, is sceptical of legendary parts of Saxo's history that could not be substantiated in the works of classical historians. Pontanus also, with scholarly acumen, denounces Johannes's Gothicist claims by concluding that they rest on the inability to differentiate Goths from *Getae*, and himself focuses on more recent history. The link between Gothic and biblical history that was lacking in Saxo but was exploited by Johannes and Huidfeldt is established by Pontanus, but only in the general way that Scandinavians, like other Europeans, descend from Japhet (Skovgaard-Petersen 2002: 166–75).

Pontanus displays no interest in Adam's description of the temple and rites of Uppsala, whether for nationalistic or critical reasons, and on the whole he deals with the subject of pre-Christian religion by omitting it. He focuses entirely on historical events or at least events with acceptable sources, to which

belong the founding of Christianity in Denmark, but he shows no interest in heathen customs. Þórr and Óðinn are mentioned, but the main purpose of mentioning them seems to be to explain the names of the days of the week. Not even the euhemeristic lists of kings of *Ynglinga saga* is put to use.

Arngrímur Jónsson: Focus on the Icelandic Sources

The scholars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were more or less exclusively restricted to Latin sources, but in 1594 a translation of *Heimskringla* was published in Copenhagen, offering the subjects of the immigration of the Asians/Æsir into the North and the euhemerized list of Nordic kings, and gradually the medieval sources of pre-Christian myth and religion were found, studied and published.

The image of old Scandinavia was substantially changed through the writings of the Icelander Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648). Arngrímur made it his task to correct and expand upon the contemporary image of Iceland, but he did so by adducing the Old Norse texts as historical sources in a way that would be decisive for Norse historiography as a whole. His *Brevis commentarius de Islandia* ('Short Commentary Concerning Iceland') (1593) is thus structured as a series of refutations of the propositions of Olaus Magnus, Albert Krantz and other historians on the North. One of the erroneous notions then current was that the volcanoes, especially Hekla, provided gorges that connected directly with the underworld and the spirits of the dead.[1] Arngrímur strongly emphasizes that Iceland is not connected to the underworld and that Hekla is to be seen in the same way as, for example, Etna in Sicily (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57: 27–29). This geological correction, made in the first part of the treatise that concerned the island's physical character, is of considerable ideological consequence. In the following part, treating the inhabitants of Iceland, Arngrímur addresses Krantz's statement that the Icelanders were converted to Christianity in 1070. He starts by returning to the notion that Iceland is connected to the underworld, and states that the idea that the realm of the dead would actually be in this world is refuted by the Bible itself (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57: 44–45). Having thus rid Iceland of the connection to Hell, Arngrímur actually manages to make Icelandic religiosity surpass that of many other countries: using the sources to place the conversion at the year 1000, and

[1] This idea is central to the nineteenth-century novel by Jules Verne, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864).

adducing commendable precedents such as Njáll of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, he concludes that heathen idolatry was expelled at a time when Christianity had not yet been infected with Papist venom. He implies that the Christian religion in Iceland was of a purer kind than that of Central Europe, more or less awaiting the Lutheran confession, which is elaborately described (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57: 45–48). While the Catholic Johannes Magnus presented the original Goths as essentially Christian by contact with Noah and identified heathen idolatry in between, the Protestant Arngrímur thus presents the original Goths as deriving from the Canaanites but without drawing conclusions about their religious customs, and he prolongs the intervening space of heathen idolatry by combining it with the era of Papist error. By making Catholicism more or less the antithesis of Christianity, Arngrímur thus eradicates or at least hides the opposition heathen-Christian by passing over pre-Christian religion and strengthening the opposition Catholic-Christian.

In *Crymogæa* ('Iceland'), published in Hamburg in 1609, Arngrímur presented a more thorough introduction to Iceland and the Icelanders, based on a new kind of research into the Norse sources. His description of the Icelanders as preserving the Old Norse language was particularly influential, paving the way not only for works such as Ole Worm's *Literatura runica* ('Runic Literature') (1636) but also for an array of historiographers over a long period of time. As Gottskálk Jensson has demonstrated (2005; 2008), Arngrímur's description of language and history is based on the historical theory of French philosopher and politician Jean Bodin in a profound way, defining the community in terms of civilization and republic. Arngrímur gathered and presented Icelandic sagas so as to make Icelandic history correspond to Rome's escaping the government of kings and instead forming a republic: in Iceland's case, that kingdom was that of Norway, and Arngrímur consistently speaks of the Icelandic *respublica*. Corresponding with Latin's status as a language of culture that has been increasingly corrupted by the romance languages, Arngrímur explains that contemporary Icelandic is the only language that maintains the old linguistic essence of the North, while the neighbouring Scandinavian languages are represented as languages in decay. In this context, the runic script achieves its true significance: just as the great languages Hebrew, Greek and Latin had their own scripts, so that old Gothic, which is now only preserved in Icelandic, had its very own form of writing.

This linguistic approach to Scandinavian history involved certain considerations connected with the question of pre-Christian religion. In the prologue to the reader, Arngrímur presents the advent of Christianity on Iceland as thoroughly positive, bringing learning to the island. The Danish kings Christian III,

Frederic II and Christian IV are thanked for bringing the evangelic light, but there are no polemics against Catholicism now. Whether or not that is due to a wider array of intended readers, pre-Christian religion is briefly mentioned as 'extirpated heathen barbary' (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57b: 9–10). In the third chapter of the first book, Arngrímur expands on the subject of language and presents the runes. According to him, Icelandic reflects, in a practically unchanged manner, the old 'Gothic' language of the North, and the runes are its particular script. This leads not only to a very purist stance but also to the question of the first inhabitants of the North.

Any national historiographer of the early modern age would wish to explain his nation's origin by tying it to biblical history, and Arngrímur achieved precisely that knot in a more sophisticated way than his predecessors. The sources, not least *Ynglingatal* in *Heimskringla* and *Snorra Edda* (the latter of which Arngrímur owned in that manuscript which, as he passed it on, achieved the name Codex Wormianus), made it clear that an Asiatic tribe had migrated to the North. However, Arngrímur explains in the fourth chapter, they were not the first: the first inhabitants of the North were giants, descended from those expelled from Palestine/Canaan by Joshua. Arngrímur suggests some explanations for the existence of giants, ending in a description of them as having particular physical powers adapted for life in the mountains. The Gothic language of the North is thus to be understood as a blend of the language of the Canaanites and that of the Asians from Troy (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57b: 43–44). This is essential not only because the history of the North is thus directly connected to biblical history, but also because the language of the North can therefore be connected directly to Hebrew, generally considered to be the most original human language, reflecting the essence of things and the will of God in a way that had deteriorated as other languages derived from it. This theory also connects the pre-Christian religion of the North to the religious customs of the Old Testament.

Following the fourth chapter's discussion of language and origin, the fifth chapter is devoted to the customs of the Icelanders, both the old and the contemporary. Referring to Tacitus, Plutarch and others, Arngrímur here describes manners of living, eating, games and so on, but, significantly, he does not treat matters of religion. On morals, he emphasizes that the Icelanders are and were strangers to luxury and excess, not by force of circumstance but by choice. However, the sixth chapter is devoted to the Icelanders' heathen religion, considered as part of the institution of society (*respublica*). Religion is described as the fourth pillar of the republic (after social order, the distribution of public offices and legislation), and Arngrímur presents the temple image of Adam of

Bremen but adapted away from Adam's Uppsala context. Þórr is still the prime god and identified with Jupiter, but beside him there are now three gods: Freyr, Niordur, and As, whom Arngrímur understands as Óðinn, having come to be considered a god because of his diabolic magic.

Instead of Adam's Uppsala scenery, Arngrímur refers to the now destroyed manuscript Vatnshyrna and mostly its *Eyrbyggja saga* (but apparently using also *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga*) and describes an iron-clad altar in Kjalarnes with a vessel for the blood of the sacrificial victims, with a tool belonging to it, like a priest's *aspergillum*, for spraying the blood over the participants. Also, there is the heavy silver ring on which oaths are sworn and which the ritual leader is to wear. These victims were mostly animals, but sometimes, Arngrímur regrets to say, human victims were offered in Kjalarnes where also a pit, *blótkellda*, was used. In one more place, he explains, human sacrifice was made: in the Þornes Thing. Still quoting *Eyrbyggja saga*, he describes the *dómhringr* where victims were sacrificed on a big rock, stained by blood (Arngrímur Jónsson 1950–57b: 57–58).

With these additions, Arngrímur ends his description of pre-Christian religion. He introduced it as one of the four universal parts of society, and he concludes it with a most elaborate rhetorical *praeteritio* ('omission'), explicitly not mentioning the corresponding practices of the Gauls, Romans and Greeks, reminding the reader of the bloody practices of Hebrews and Jews, as described in the Bible, and finally stressing that these abominable actions did not last for long in Iceland, and only occurred in these two places. On the whole,

> His importance for posterity was twofold: for foreign scholarship his works became the first source of information about the old literature of Iceland, for his own countrymen his humanist view of the history of Iceland determined their historical attitude for many generations and created a new interest in the old literature, which is reflected in a sudden growth of copying of ancient texts in the seventeenth century. (Jakob Benediktsson 1991: 103)

Language and Script

The runes were a topic of considerable interest, not least because they could be adduced as proof of the closeness of Old Norse to Hebrew and thus to the *Ursprache*, connecting to esoteric and metaphysical wisdom. The runestones also served well in the strife about Gothic ancestry, as they constituted actual evidence of this old culture. So, the runes became the object of national competition. In 1611, the pioneer figure of Swedish antiquarian studies, Johannes

Bureus (1568–1652), claimed the runes for Sweden in a most congenial way by publishing the first Swedish ABC-book ever printed. This book, reprinted twice over a short period of time, was designed as a Swedish primer in runes rather than Latin characters. Without any theorizing, Bureus presents the runes as the natural script of Sweden. Implicitly, they also become the script of Christian faith, since the texts used are 'Our Father', the Confession of faith and the Ten Commandments. While such texts were common in early primers, their appearance in runes turned them into an old Gothic item. Bureus also published other works on the runes, including *Monumenta Sveo-Gothica* ('Swedish-Gothic Monuments') (1624), with illustrations of a number of Swedish runestones.

The runic initiative, however, was soon taken over by Danish scholars. In 1636, Ole Worm (1588–1654) published *Runer, seu Danica literatura antiquissima, Vulgo Gothica dicta* ('Runes, or the Old Danish Literature, Commonly Called Gothic'). This work's long title is frequently abbreviated to *Literatura runica*. It is an extensive survey of the Gothic — understood as particularly Danish — language, literature and script which appeared in an expanded edition in 1651. This influential work provided a thorough introduction to that grand and mystifying Old Norse poetry which had until then been very much unknown. Identifying everything 'Gothic' with the runes, Worm made great efforts to render poems in runes. As his Swedish competitor Olaus Verelius angrily pointed out, such a manoeuvre had no support in the manuscripts.

Worm declared that the runes, like the Gothic language, derive from Hebrew, thus again making the connection with biblical history. By mentioning the Gothic 'Silver Bible' of Wulfila, and claiming it was written in runes, he firmly connects runes with the Christian religion (Worm 1651:105–09).[2] In the Introduction, Worm explains that the runes function both as ordinary letters and as magical tools. Just like Hebrew letters, the shape of runic signs equals their meaning: this cabbalistic property may resemble Christian mysticism, but does not reach the higher religious truths, Worm underlines (1651: 14–15, 84–89). As Óðinn is the one who invented the enigmatic runes (1651: 94–97), his role becomes similar to that of the Old Testament prophets. Worm agreed that the runes must have been developed from Hebrew, but in his opinion, runic poetry had flourished around the time of the birth of Christ, and the runestones

[2] Worm published a second editon in 1651, and citations are given from that edition here. The Gothic Codex Argenteus, or Silver Bible, was presented to the University of Uppsala by Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie in 1669. It is not written in runes, but in rustic capitals.

must have been erected a couple of hundred years later (1651: 104–07). On another axis of authority, Worm is careful to point out that the Gothic poetry which he consistently renders in runes is artistic to a degree that is second neither to Greek nor Latin poetry: 'They have their own fables in the book Edda, and constantly allude to them. So, they call earth "flesh of Ymir", since the gods according to myth created earth from the flesh of the giant Ymir according to the sixth fable of Edda' (1651: 168–69). In an 'Appendix, more completely describing the use of runes in poetry', Worm includes theses by two Icelanders, Þorlákur Skúlason and Magnús Ólafsson. On the one hand, the complexity of the poetry and skills of the poets are propounded; on the other hand, the old skalds are portrayed as inspired vessels in analogy with Plato's description of the inspired poet in *Ion*. Thus describing the Icelandic skald as forcefully enveloped in poetic fury, the metaphysical character of runic poetry is enhanced. The fact that the Icelandic poems were transcribed into runes added considerably to the attractively mystifying impression of Old Norse poetry. This was the source of poems such as Egill Skallagrímsson's *Hǫfuðlausn* and the anonymous poem *Krákumál*, which would prove very popular throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

While the runes are only vaguely connected to pre-Christian religion in *Literatura runica*, their role in religious practice was much more developed in Worm's next grand work. In 1643 he published *Danicorum monumentorum libri sex* ('Six Books of Danish Monuments'), a monumental volume recording and analysing the Danish and Norwegian runestones. The first book, about a hundred pages, consists in a thorough presentation of ancient Danish monuments, from grave mounds to stone settings, altars and burial customs, to the runestones. Worm relies heavily on Arngrímur Jónsson, rendering several of his quotations (but printed in runes), as well as on Saxo, the Magnus brothers and a long line of Latin authorities. Here, the description of the Uppsala temple of Adam of Bremen is also thoroughly rendered, both through Olaus Magnus and Albert Krantz. Worm remarks that in Denmark few traces of sacrifice remain and suggests that the reason may be that the Danes were anxious to exchange heathen practice for Christian ritual (1643: 7). Worm thus offers an elaborate presentation of all aspects of memorial customs, including religious sacrifice as one means of celebrating the dead, combining a wide range of classical, medieval and Old Norse sources and authorities. He carefully discusses Christian traits on the runestones: the crosses with which they are often decorated, he says, can sometimes be Thor's-hammers, but if there is a cross the stone is to be considered Christian (1643: 94) he concludes, in opposition to Olaus Magnus. The heathens certainly embraced the notion of the immortal soul, he contin-

ues, but to his mind there is no reason to understand the common formula 'God help his soul' as anything but Christian.

This magnificent folio of five hundred pages made the Swedish counterpart, the *Monumenta* of Bureus, look ridiculously meagre, and in addition Worm claimed that the runes were not so old as the Swedes would like to have them. Georg Stiernhielm (1598–1672), disciple and son-in-law of Bureus, productive antiquarian scholar and above all 'the father of Swedish poetry', filled the margins of his copy of *Danicorum monumentorum* (now in the University of Gothenburg Library) with venomous remarks and attached to the flyleaf two epigrams, explaining how Worm has become pregnant with grand delusions of the past but given birth only to — worms. The first of them reads:

> Grandibus ît prægnans Antiqvi Iconibus Ævi
> Wormius; ast peperit? Nil nisi vermiculos!
> Verborum phaleras, fucos, mendacia tolle:
> Quid superest? Lapis; et barbara simplicitas.
>
> (Wormius walks pregnant with grand images of antiquity.
> But what has he borne? Nothing but small worms!
> Remove his words' finery, cosmetics and lies:
> What remains? Stone and barbaric simplicity.)

Stiernhielm made numerous annotations and comments in the book, but in the general introduction of the first book, he raises no objections. It is only when Worm comes to the interpretation of actual inscriptions that Stiernhielm's objections begin: he questions a number of Worm's conclusions with words such as *nugæ* ('nonsense'), *mendacia* ('lies'), *fabula ab ipso ficta* ('a fable he made up himself') or *farcimina vermiculosa* ('intestines full of worms'). He uses the word *falsum* ('falsehood') so often that he is compelled to abbreviate it as *fals*. (In the same volume, there are also comments by a later hand, vehemently contradicting Worm's interpretation of 'God help his soul': according to this hand, which appears to be that of Abraham Abrahamsson Hülphers, a Linnaean disciple of the late eighteenth century, the word 'god' on the runestones means only 'prominent man' and thus, the runestones can be placed much further back in Gothic history.)

Although the runes were connected with magic, in the discussions of script pre-Christian religion appears not to have been associated with demonic illusions but rather with biblical ancestry and practice. As the esoteric dimensions of the runes are underlined, they point toward wisdom not equal with religious insight, but on the way toward it. The runes are one instance of commemorating practice and thus associated with pre-Christian customs and sacrifice, but

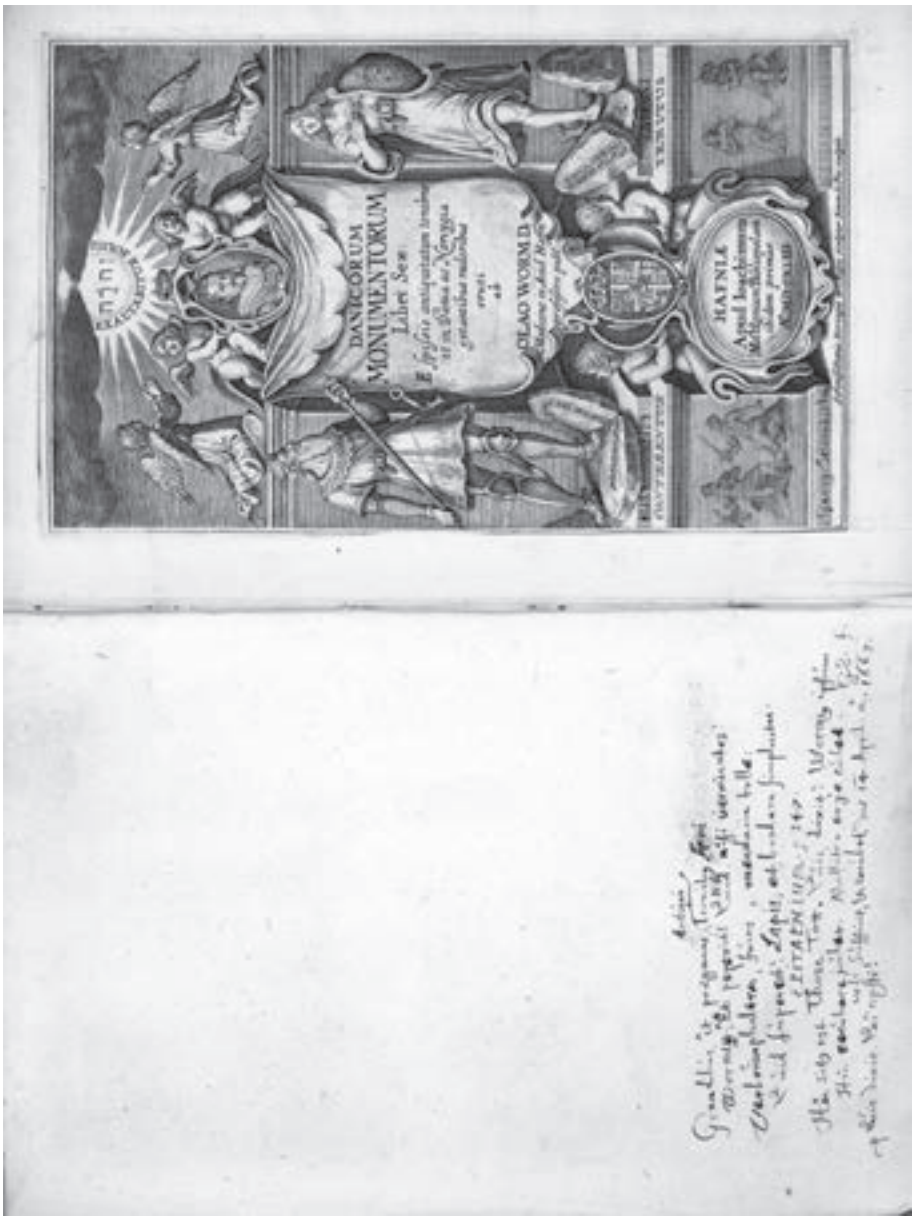


Figure 3.1.2. Georg Stiernhielm's copy of Worm's *Danicorum monumentorum libri sex*. Photograph courtesy of the University of Gothenburg Library.

the association does not result in a devaluation of the runes. The exposition of pre-Christian cultural habits that Worm initiated because of the runes was to be substantially developed by Thomas Bartholin.

The Short-Cut to Valhǫll

One of the examples of Old Norse fortitude from medieval Icelandic literature was the tale of Óðinn's hall Valhǫll (Valhalla), carefully described in *Snorra Edda*. The description of this place of eternal bliss for those who had fallen in battle aroused considerable interest, not least in the very first edition of a *fornaldarsaga* to be published: the sagas of Gautrekr and of Hrólfr Gautreksson, which Olaus Verelius (1618–82) had printed in Uppsala in 1664. The edition offered the Icelandic text with a parallel Swedish translation, followed by careful scholarly notes. The reason that this was the first edition of an Old Norse saga was that Swedish historiographers had been able to lay their hands on a native Icelander, Jón Rugman, when they seized a Danish ship on its way from Iceland to Copenhagen in 1658. Rugman had with him a number of manuscripts, probably to ingratiate himself at the university, but these manuscripts came to form the basis of a number of Swedish editions and translations during the 1660s and 1670s. Rugman himself was transported to Visingsborg and later Uppsala, where, willingly or unwillingly, he became a very important asset to Swedish translating and editing. The notes and comments to *Gothrici & Rolfi Westrogotiæ regum historia* are written with a very serious intent to reconstruct Old 'Gothic' habits and customs. *Gautreks saga* was particularly well suited to this purpose, as it initially takes place in Swedish Västra Götaland. The saga was less well suited for other reasons: especially initially, it is most of all a slapstick parody on the dim-witted inhabitants of the Swedish backwoods. Thus the edition embodies sharp contrasts between the humorous Icelandic text on the one side, and the Latin notes, striving for conclusions concerning ancient beliefs and conditions, on the other (the Swedish translation landing somewhere in between).

The edition laid the basis for widespread notions of the *ætternisstapi*, *ättestupa* ('family cliff') in Swedish: a high cliff from which the old and sick would throw themselves, or be thrown, in order to avoid further misery. There were some Norse and Latin records of pre-Christian customs of killing off the old and sick, as well as sacrifice using cliffs, but *Gautreks saga* offered a vivid scenario. A farmer is forced to house King Gautrekr, who has lost his way in the dark woods, for a night. Thinking that repeated visits of that kind will make him poor, the farmer decides to prevent destiny by killing himself. He does so

Figure 3.1.3. Erik Dahlberg, *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, III, 49: 'Ættestupa, Ættestörta, or Ættestapul'. Photograph courtesy of the University of Gothenburg Library.

by throwing himself from the nearby cliff, the *ætternisstapi*, and explains that not only he but also his thrall and wife will be able to enjoy the pleasures of Valhǫll if he takes them with him over the edge. Subsequently, their children form couples and in the end most of them throw themselves from the cliff for the most ridiculous reasons.

The scholarly notes to Verelius's edition take the account seriously, presenting information about pre-Christian habits of incest and polygamy, but most of all presenting the notions of Valhǫll and life after death. Verelius's information comes mostly from *Snorra Edda*, and he extends the condition that one had to fall in battle in order to be received into Valhǫll to 'violent death', in order to explain how suicide can bring farmer, thrall and wife to Valhǫll (Verelius 1664: 23–27). Verelius presents the notions as a construct formulated to make people hold death in contempt, and the additional notes by Johannes Schefferus deal further with the subjects of suicide and bravery, as well as other

virtues, describing the death of both husband and wife as a 'singular example of marital love' (Verelius 1664: 109).

While the comments cautiously avoid discussing actual habits of death from a cliff, the account of the *ättestupa*, firmly based in old Sweden and manifestly visible in physical nature, aroused considerable interest, and a search for possible *ättestupor* started in the country. So, the monumental topographical survey of old and present Sweden, *Suecia antiqua et hodierna* ('Sweden Ancient and Modern'), organized by Erik Dahlberg (1625–1703) and published between 1667 and 1715, among its many impressive copperplate engravings, offers one of an *ättestupa*. The idea of Valhǫll as an incitement to contempt of death was another theme to be richly developed by Thomas Bartholin.

Thomas Bartholin on the Causes of the Danes' Contempt of Death

The fortitude and contempt of death of the Northern peoples had been a standard topic since antiquity, and was developed not least by the Magnus brothers. As Olaus's cultural history was followed up in 1647 by Johannes Loccenius's (1598–1677) *Antiqvitatum SveoGothicarum, cum huius ævi moribus, institutis ac ritibus indigenis pro re nata comparatarum, libri tres* ('Three Books on the Swedish-Gothic Antiquities, Compared to Customs, Institutions and Rituals as They Appear Today'), further sources of antiquity were added but not many Nordic ones. Later Humanists were able to enjoy an increasing number of sources as they began being published, and a vast corpus of material was gathered primarily in Copenhagen. The Icelandic scholar and manuscript collector Árni Magnusson was central in this, although he did not himself publish any major studies (see Már Jónsson 2012), as was Þormóður Torfason (Latinized as Torfæus), who focussed on historiography and thus engaged in annalistic source criticism rather than the study of pre-Christian religion (but he did draw the list of Norwegian kings past Odin back to Noah; Skovgaard-Petersen 2008: 14). Torfæus's 1702 *Series dynastarum et regum Daniae* ('Series of Denmark's Dynasties and Kings') would establish a history based on the Icelandic sources rather than on Saxo, which supplies an (for its time) elaborate discussion of historical critique (Már Jónsson 2012; Boje Mortensen 2008; Ólafur Halldórsson 1993; Malm 1996: 59–61).

This activity laid the ground for a work which can be said to focus entirely on the question of pre-Christian religion: Thomas Bartholin the younger's (1659–90) *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus libri tres* ('Three Books on Danish Antiquity and the Reasons for the Heathen Danes' Contempt of Death'), published in 1689. This work focused

heavily on what was presented as an especially Danish spirit, exploring a wide range of material. Its intention appears to have been to inspire the Danes in their conflicts with Sweden (Sveinbjörn Hrafnsson 1989), and it forms a new scholarly approach, focusing on notions of the life and death of the ancestors in a manner approaching a history of mentalities. It is obvious that Bartholin was very keen to make known the grand material that had gradually become available, not least through the work of Torfæus and Árni Magnússon (cf. Már Jónsson 2012: 83–85). Bartholin's references to authorities of antiquity, the Middle Ages and early modern times are lavish, but he presents a rich array of Old Norse material with great ease, drawing on the assistance of Árni Magnússon.

Bartholin starts out by establishing the need for soldiers not to fear death in order to be efficient, and concludes that the old Danes, such as the Jomsburg Vikings, were eminent in that respect. The reasons for their contempt of, and even longing for, death he finds in their religion, principally the notion of a reward for brave warriors in Valhǫll. Thus he devotes the seven hundred pages of the book to descriptions and examples of the notions of death and the afterlife, the concept of honour, ideals of dying and rewards in the afterlife, notions of the gods and sacrifice, burial customs including burning and leaving money, goods and weapons in the graves, the means by which honour and history are recorded, discussions of the source value of the Old Norse texts, destiny and ways to divulge it, including discussion of the runes, *seiðr* (a form of sorcery), prophetesses (*vǫlur*) and more. One theme that he promotes is that of the Vikings drinking beer from hollowed human skulls: he bases this not least on a mistranslation of a kenning for drinking horns from Worm's *Literatura runica*, where *ór bjúgviðum hausa* ('out of the curved trees of skulls' [DRINKING HORNS]) is translated as *concavis crateribus craniorum* ('with hollowed beakers of skulls') (Clunies Ross 2001: 21, 127), and even develops the examples into gold-plated hollowed crania (Bartholin 1689: 535–58). In all, Bartholin gathers together practically all topics relating to pre-Christian religion and adds a substantial number of new ones.

To a great extent, Bartholin returns to topics already treated by Worm. This obviously concerns the runes and their different uses, but it also concerns burial customs. In *Monumenta Danica*, Worm elaborately describes burial customs, using a great number of actual finds. Bartholin also elaborates on burial customs, but does so by using textual sources rather than the archaeological ones.

As Bartholin admits, the contempt of death is not purely Danish but rather common to a number of Northern and Western peoples. Notwithstanding, his focus is on the Danes, and he explains that compared to, for example, Greek

mythology, the Danes have a great advantage. While the heroes in Homer end up in a miserable place after death, thus scaring all those subject to death, in the Old Norse religion they are invited to blissful days with Óðinn. Bartholin describes this as an error in Homer (1689: 397), in a way that suggests that the contempt of death among the Danes is not actually a result of their religion but a result of that religion which someone has chosen to present to them in order to make them valuable warriors. The same notion comes to the fore when the origin of mankind is described: the myth has it that Óðinn created the first man and woman out of trees in order for the northerners not to be afraid of death by water (1689: 258).

This means that the entire Nordic pre-Christian religious system can be viewed not as the illusions of demons and devils or malicious people, but as a constructive, didactic societal system. In this sense, it is to be understood in accordance with Snorri's account, as the product of the Asians, human beings who migrated to the North. Accordingly, heathen sacrifice is not denied, but neither does Bartholin show much interest in it. Adam of Bremen is referred to, but mainly in order to discuss the gods and their Roman counterparts (1689: 350). Rather, Bartholin argues, with examples, that the Danes were happy to fight even false gods and to spurn heathen idols even before they were Christianized (1689: 68). The warriors' habit of promising themselves to Óðinn is described and exemplified, but not really considered as sacrifice. The rationale of merit is severe, as it is in the sources: those who die in combat come to Óðinn, those who die of disease or old age come to Hel. Slaves that die are despised by Óðinn and belong instead to Þórr, Bartholin states (1689: 387), and here he appears to have been forced to rid himself of a source at the last minute.

When *Gautreks saga* was published by Olaus Verelius in 1664, the *æternisstapi* was presented with great care as confirmation of the practice of taking the speedy way to Óðinn by throwing oneself from a high cliff which included the option that a slave could come to Valhǫll if he followed his master over the cliff. Bartholin has a footnote reference to *Gautreks saga* about this, but this reference appears to be the remains of something that had been removed, for the text has no mention of *Gautreks saga* and no footnote mark. On the following pages, *Gautreks saga* is referred to, but only concerning a later episode. It thus appears that the *æternisstapi* was first adduced as an example, but in the final stages was removed as it contradicted the rule that was the foundation of Bartholin's whole work: that Óðinn only welcomed the brave.

The pleasures of Valhǫll were not the only reward of fearlessness: the other gain was reputation. Bartholin devotes much space to the means of eternalizing

glory, which was primarily poetry. The kings kept skalds who truthfully represented the deeds, not only of the kings, as Snorri has it, but also of the other warriors around them. Thus, Bartholin concludes, the poetry of the skalds is a reliable source of history, while the prose sources built up around the poems may not always be accurate. Bartholin warns that one has to be careful with the Icelandic sources, but the nature of his project gives him a wide range of possibilities — and the opportunity to dismiss entirely the comparatively modern accusation of lack of source criticism which had been forcefully levelled by the bishop and scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) in his *Traité de l'origine des romans* of 1670 (1689: 193). Eddic material obviously has not the same factual character, but Bartholin quotes the English scholar Robert Sheringham: 'In the fables there is nothing or very little that appears corrupted or changed: just as in the fables of Homer, Hesiod and the Greeks, much is believed to be true'. Sheringham's and Bartholin's concept of truth is adapted to the scope of Bartholin's project of the history of mentality: all sources cannot be used for chronological reconstruction, but they are true documents of religion, beliefs and customs (1689: 152, 183–94; Clunies Ross and Quinn 1994: 194–98). The historian Thomas Bartholin focuses on Old Norse notions, and thus is able to write a heroic history without very much concerning himself with the question of what actually took place and what did not. In that respect, he would be followed in a particular way by the Swedish romanticist Carl Jonas Love Almqvist more than a century later.

Olaus Rudbeck: Religion as Historical Source

The work most renowned for an exaggerated interpretation of Nordic prehistory is Swedish: Olaus Rudbeck's (1630–1702) *Atlantica*, published in four volumes with both Latin and Swedish text between 1679 and 1702. In the *Atlantica*, Rudbeck developed the traditional euhemeristic approach in his very own way, combining it with linguistic argument and empirical study into a grandiose and novel re-evaluation of world history. In this project, pre-Christian religion became not only source material but even Rudbeck's analytical methodology.

Rudbeck's thesis was a new version of traditional gothicism: not only did the powerful Goths come from Sweden, but Sweden was in fact the origin of all Western culture. The mythology, religion and in part the history of antiquity were in fact distorted accounts of events which had taken place in the North. This is the reason for the title of his work: his main claim is that Sweden is really the legendary island Atlantis, described by Plato in his *Critias*. In Plato's

account, the gods had divided the world between themselves, and Poseidon had received the vast island of Atlantis, making his oldest son Atlas its king. The island had prospered in the most amazing way, not least because its inhabitants held deeds much higher than wealth and comfort, but, as the divine origin of its inhabitants had been diluted, morals had deteriorated and in the end the island was flooded and disappeared. In Rudbeck's interpretation, however, the island was only flooded in a metaphorical sense: by humans, attracted to the wonderful place. The island was in fact a peninsula: Sweden. Poseidon, Rudbeck demonstrates, is the Swedish Necken, also known as Óðinn (Rudbeck posits several kings by the name Óðinn and declares that the name became a word for 'king'). Atlas is the same as Atli, a name known from several Old Norse sources. It is very much by etymological argument that Rudbeck works: Plato described Atlantis with the Greek word *nesos* for 'island', and Rudbeck declares that this goes back to the Swedish word *näs*, which in fact means 'peninsula'; Hercules is the Swedish name *Här-Kuller* (Army-Charles); Thebes is in fact Swedish *Täby*, outside today's Stockholm.

After the Flood, Noah's son Japhet and his descendants had taken command of the North. Sweden proved to be a most delightful place, gathering many eminent men and women. The confusion of languages took place soon after the Flood, and Swedish became one of the main languages, indeed the most prominent one, and the one in which culture was first developed. Rudbeck refers to Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius and other authorities to prove that in this age of enigmas (*tempus mytologicum*), poets had been responsible for transmitting knowledge of events past, and the poems thus convey history, although in a form in need of interpretation: 'The office of the poets is to change and depict what has surely and truly taken place through beautified/veiled (*förblommerade*) similes and enigmas' (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: II, 41) Thus, Rudbeck is able to ransack Old Norse sources, the biblical books and texts of antiquity and the Latin Middle Ages in order to construct a consistent history of Sweden. In this, the myths of antiquity become secondary versions of Old Norse myths, which in turn are distorted versions of historical events. However, not only religious myths but also religious rites prove to be important tools for reconstructing the glorious past.

Rudbeck lists over a hundred points from Plato's account of Atlantis, demonstrating how they correspond to other accounts of the North. As no. 80 he quotes Plato that 'Every fifth and sixth year alternately, they (the under-kings or lawmen) had to come to Uppsala or the hall of Necken.' What Plato did say was that there was a gathering at the Poseidon temple on Atlantis, but to Rudbeck, the translation of Poseidon-Necken and Atlantis's capital —

Uppsala — is already a given (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: I, 165–66, 377–78). Poseidon's temple, Adam of Bremen's temple, Old Norse Valhǫll: all are to Rudbeck descriptions of the temple of Uppsala (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: II, 46). Plato's description of the rites on Atlantis is a vital part of Rudbeck's argument, since he can tie it to the gatherings every ninth year that Adam of Bremen described, as well as connect it with what Ericus Olai had described. Rudbeck does not develop the parallels more than to explain the difference concerning the period of repetition and appears not to wish to delve into the issue of human sacrifice. Plato had described sacrifice of bulls, and while Rudbeck mentions the temple of Uppsala on a number of occasions, there are two apparent rules that govern his treatment of it: he does not wish to speak of human sacrifice, and he is reluctant to credit Adam as a source. So he even manages to adduce the golden chain surrounding the temple according to Adam without mentioning Adam at all, instead only referring to Krantz, Svaning and Johannes Magnus who had repeated Adam's description (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: I, 162, cf. I, 174–75).

On the whole, Rudbeck's euhemerism explains pre-Christian religion not as the result of demons blinding men but only as the result of great kings having been so famous that they came to be understood as gods. So, Rudbeck often speaks of 'gods or kings' as synonyms, and he carefully explains that the pre-Christian religion of the North is based on original knowledge of the God of the Old Testament. This comes naturally, as the Nordic ancestor Japhet arrived in the North through Noah, rescued from the Flood according to God's will. As Noah's descendants were not obliged to meet God face to face and speak directly to him, they came to forget the creator and instead worshipped his creation, not least the sun, giver of warmth, light and life. The sun they called Óðinn and several other names, while lightning, created between sun and earth, received the name of Þórr and so on. Beside this natural religion, Rudbeck, just like Snorri, discerns a historical development in which kings and heroes had the same names and laid the foundation for myths parallel to those explained by natural religion (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702], II: 148–51). As Rudbeck's focus is entirely on laying bare historical events, it is consistently historical references he seeks when interpreting the myths.

Rudbeck treats the runes in a similar manner. He devotes much attention to them but reveals no interest in their magical characteristics. To Rudbeck, they are a seminal part of the argument that Nordic culture, history and myth were exported to Greece, the Greek alphabet being a development of the runic futhark (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: II, 527–28), and he thus elaborates on how they were used for writing and for calendars.

Rudbeck, then, reinterprets pre-Christian myth and rite in radically new ways, but he also uses pre-Christian myth, or rather mythography, to authorize his method. In the second chapter of the second volume he discusses evaluation of sources, practices of interpretation and legitimacy. Rudbeck starts out by referring to authorities such as Eusebius, Clement, Lactantius, Macrobius and others, but for the fundamental issue of how and when to interpret the enigmas, similes and other sources, he finds it necessary to turn to Old Norse authority, more precisely Snorri Sturluson. As Rudbeck has defined the sources as veiled poems, he now emphasizes the interpretation of imagery, and he does so by paraphrasing Snorri on kennings. Snorri's description in *Skáldskaparmál* of how kennings may be construed — by way of naming a god such as Óðinn or Þórr with Týr's name and adding a characterizing word which gives the frame of reference in which to understand the circumlocution (*SnE* 1998: 1, 5) — was known not least from Resen's *Edda Islandorum* (1665: Dd 1^{r-v}). Rudbeck develops Snorri's words on skaldic diction and turns them into a principle of historical analysis. His main proposition is that in order to interpret the sources at hand, one must see utterances in their right context and understand the underlying intention:

> Dherföre är såsom Edda tahlar om wåre gamble Scalder, at en får gifwa alle Gudar, Konungar, Förstar, Diuur, Foglar, Fiskar, Örter och Trään, etc. andras Nampn, allenast han något tillägger, genom hwilket han kiennes igen, antingen aff dhess serdeles gierningh, eller Slächt, eller Fäderneslandh, eller något annat: såsom om man säger dhen Eenögde Nicudur, då förstås Oden, ty han war eenögd, nemner man om Siökrijg och kallar en Siöwarg, då förstås om Siöröfware, talar man om Fiskar, så är det Geddan. (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: ii, 41)

> (Therefore, it is as our *Edda* says about our old skalds, that one may give all gods, kings, leaders, animals, birds, fish, herbs and trees, etc. the name of others, if only one adds something which characterizes it, either a deed, or family, or homeland, or something else. So, if one says the one-eyed Nicudur, then Oden is understood, because he was one-eyed. If one speaks of sea-war and calls someone a sea-wolf, then a pirate is understood, but if one speaks of fish, then it is the pike.)

In this way, Rudbeck extends the applicability of Snorri's analytic precept for skaldic diction into a method for historical interpretation of a wide range of source material. While Snorri demands a characterizing description, a second word which explains in which context the kenning's base-word is to be understood, Rudbeck refines his method by proposing that a contextualizing word is not needed if one is able to define the context, the frame of reference, in some other manner. So Rudbeck is able to handle an otherwise fairly tricky objection to his thesis: Plato's words that there were elephants on Atlantis:

> Elephanter äro ofta införde i Swerige, men aldrig här i myckenheet sedda, och derföre förstås här genom Elephanter Ulfar, ty man lär af Edda uti Diurens namn, at man må kalla det ena diuret med det andras namn, allenast det skal igenkiennas wid sina åthäfwor och natur, eller wid sit boo och hemwist. [...] Att nu här af Platone Ulfar kallas Elephanter på Skaldeart, wiises strax af Platonis efterföljande ord, i hwilka han kallar det Diuret det snålesta. Det är nu hela werlden bekandt, at intet Diur är snålare af alla grymma och snåla, såsom Leyon, Biörnar, Parder, och sådana, än som Ulfwen. (Rudbeck 1937–50 [1679–1702]: i, 184)

> (Elephants have often been taken to Sweden, but have never been seen in any abundance. Therefore, by elephants wolves are to be understood, for the Edda teaches that one may name one animal with the name of another, if only it is possible to recognize it through its habits and nature, or its home. [...] It is obvious that Plato in a skaldic manner calls wolves elephants, as he subsequently calls it the most voracious animal. Now all the world knows that of all savage and voracious animals, such as lions, bears, leopards, etc., none is more voracious than the wolf.)

While Snorri in his *Edda* presented myths as a source for new skalds to expand their diction, Rudbeck in this manner presents myths as a source for historiography. He not only analyses myths of the pre-Christian North, but also proposes pre-Christian poetry and Christian (Snorronian) poetics, based on the designations of religious characters and events, as an historiographical method. Rudbeck considers Snorri to have misunderstood a great deal of his sources, but makes great use of Snorri's lists of *heiti* not least for religious phenomena, and in this way elevates his poetics into an all-embracing method of historical interpretation which is astounding in its ambition and remarkable in its incongruity (Malm 1996: 79–91).

In this way, Rudbeck earned his bad reputation, but it should be pointed out that he combined these aspects with a comparatively modern empirical methodology, for example when determining the age of monuments by measuring the depth of soil. Gunnar Eriksson, who has clarified this and pointed to the closeness between Rudbeck's and Francis Bacon's methodology, terms this way of studying the world as God's book 'baroque science' (Eriksson 1994; cf. Wallette 2004).

Aftermath

Rudbeck's monumental interpretation was built on a general inspiration of the Swedish great era, and, although it had no chances of survival for long, did have some followers in Sweden at least. The best known of these were Erik Julius Biörner (1696–1750) and Johannes Göransson (1712–69). Biörner steadfastly fought the emerging new historiographical ideas, constantly renewing his argu-

ments for the great age and status of the Swedish nation. In *Svea Rikens Hävda Ålder* ('The Alleged Age of the Kingdom of the Swedes') (1748), he claimed that the Swedish nation was already thriving by the time of Egyptian antiquity. His zeal also resulted in a grand volume containing translations of *fornaldarsögur*, *Nordiska kämpa dater* ('Nordic Heroic Feats') (1737). Among these were the saga of Friðþjófr, which would inspire Esaias Tegnér's (1782–1846) world-famous *Frithiofs saga*. Göransson first devised a Swedish history which started with the kings Bore, Thor and Odin (*Is atlinga*, 1747), but later developed the argument so as to include pre-Christian Sweden in Christendom by making Gomer, grandson of Noah, the first Swedish ruler in *Svea Rikes Konungars Historia Ok Ättartal, Jfrån 2200 År före Christum, Jntil 1749* ('History and Dynasty of the Kings of the Swedish Kingdom from 2200 BC to 1749').

Alongside the idea of autochthonous Goths, the desire to connect pre-Christian religion with Christian history was developed in various ways, preferably so as to connect Protestantism or Catholicism (depending on the writer's religious persuasion) to heathen abomination. The immigration myth from *Ynglinga saga* managed to survive into the Enlightenment. The central figure of the Enlightenment in Sweden, Olof Dalin, vehemently ridiculed the old school patriots such as Biörner and Göransson. However, even in his own, in several senses very forward-looking historiography *Swea rikes historia* ('The History of the Swedish Kingdom') (1747–62), Dalin himself posits the immigration of the Æsir from Asia, led by Óðinn or, as Dalin also calls him, Sigge Fridulfsson.

Bartholin's historiographical work enjoyed a much more dignified afterlife. Although devised as a nationalistic appeal for belligerent valour, its focus on mentality liberated it from many of the problems that 'hard' historiography was subjected to. In addition, its sources were to a great extent literary, collected mainly through the endeavours of Bartholin's assistant Árni Magnússon, and they were to command considerable attention internationally. Without this work, the aesthetic movement named 'the Nordic Renaissance', which spread through Europe during the second part of the eighteenth century would not have been possible. This movement, which developed the interest in all things Northern from antiquarian, historiographical and political into purely aesthetic fascination, started with the works of the Swiss Paul Henri Mallet, who encountered Bartholin's work during his stay in Copenhagen and transformed a number of the poems there into evocative French translations in his vastly influential *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poesie des Celtes* (1756) (see below Chapter 4.5; Blanck 1911; Lönnroth 1994; Böldl 2000: 129–45). In Great Britain, this tradition was influentially developed by Thomas Percy (Clunies Ross 1998; Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999) and in Germany, it,

together with biblical poetry, became the foundation of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's new poetic diction.

As interest turned toward the aesthetic and the cult of the primitive sublime, notions of correspondence to Christian religion became less interesting, and questions of contempt of death were subsumed under a more general fascination with the primitive. The interest in establishing national seniority and authority, and tracing political power back in time, diminished considerably, at least in Scandinavia. The description of the temple at Uppsala and the central position of Uppsala in ancient Sweden, however, has continued to nourish chauvinistic dreams up to our own day.

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3.2 – Icelandic Humanism

Annette Lassen

The wider Humanist and predominantly Latin reception of Old Norse mythology was made possible by the renewal of interest among Icelanders themselves in their early culture, including pre-Christian religion and myth. This chapter provides a survey of the scholarly milieux in Iceland in the period from the Reformation to the start of the nineteenth century: the scholars, their works, theories and production of new redactions of medieval texts. Moreover, the scholarly interest in Old Icelandic subject matter inspired native poets, many of whom were also scholars, not just to produce traditional *rímur* on mythological subjects but, more ambitiously, to imitate the ancient eddic style and compose new mythological poetry. Some of this poetry struck such authentic chords that it was included in erudite editions, either unwittingly or because the editors admired its genuine artfulness, fully aware that it was not medieval. In this chapter we shall look at such antiquarian pieces, successful new compositions like *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Gunnarsslagur*, in addition to the no less interesting mythological *rímur*.

Arngrímur Jónsson[1]

European Humanist writings on Old Norse matters would not have been possible had it not been for the scholarly work of Icelanders. Virtually every early

[1] Arngrímur's work is also discussed in Chapter 3.1 in the context of Scandinavian Humanism more generally.

Annette Lassen is Associate Professor at the Arnamagnæan Institute in the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics (Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab) at the University of Copenhagen. Her research focuses on Old Norse literature and mythology and their reception. Her publications include *Øjet og blindheden i norrøn litteratur og mytologi* (2003), *Odin på kristent pergament* (2011), *Islændingesagaernes verden* (2017) and the edition *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* (2011).

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume 1: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 219–245
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edition of Old Norse texts was prepared by Icelandic scholars, including the accompanying translations, as was the case with Resen's *Edda* and Bartholin's *Antiquitates Danicae*, discussed in Chapter 3.1 above. The interest of Danish historiographers, such as Arild Huitfeldt (1546–1609) and Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616), in Icelandic medieval sources no doubt played an important role in legitimizing the study of the medieval heritage among clerically trained Lutheran Icelanders, who were largely suspicious of Catholic remains. Arngrímur Jónsson lærði ('the Learned') (1568–1648) was a pioneer in the use of medieval Icelandic manuscripts as sources for early Scandinavian history. He is particularly known for two of his works, *Brevis commentarius de Islandia* ('Short Commentary on Iceland') (1593), a polemical pamphlet in defence of Iceland and Icelanders, which he wrote at the request of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorlákssson (1541–1627), and which was mainly aimed at certain popular Low German accounts of Iceland, and *Crymogæa* ('Iceland') (1609), the first Humanist history of Iceland, including a first-ever political definition of the Icelandic republic and an explanation of the origin and importance of the Icelandic language. Arngrímur Jónsson studied in Copenhagen in 1585–89, and in 1592–93 he visited Copenhagen again, bringing with him a manuscript of *Brevis commentarius*, and came into contact with important scholars, such as Arild Huitfeldt, Niels Krag (1550–1602) and Jon Jacobsen Venusin (d. 1608) (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 12).

Brevis commentarius was printed in the spring of 1593 and soon became widely known in Europe. Back in Iceland, Arngrímur Jónsson corresponded with the Danish historiographers Krag and Venusin, who encouraged him to collect historiographic material. These Danish historiographers needed his help to obtain readable versions of Icelandic sources of Danish history. In the winter of 1595–96, Arngrímur began to collect historical material (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 53), and in 1596 he finished his *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta* ('Fragments of Danish Affairs'), a work that was primarily a summary of *Knýtlinga saga* and *Skjǫldunga saga*. The latter saga and the manuscript on which Arngrímur Jónsson based his translation were later lost, and today *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta* is our best source for the saga's contents. In 1597 Arngrímur Jónsson further completed *Supplementum historiæ Norvagicæ* ('Supplement of Norwegian History'), in which, among other things, he gave an account of Óðinn's migrations, in accordance with Snorri's *Edda*. The Icelandic sources begin with his migration to the North, and Arngrímur had not been able to trace anything older than that. Later, in *Crymogæa*, he argued that Scandinavia was already inhabited when Óðinn and his people arrived (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 50–51). The ancient northern European language,

which the Icelanders alone had preserved unspoiled, while the neighbouring peoples had lost it, arose, according to Arngrímur, as a hybrid between the language of Óðinn and the language of the Scandinavian giants.

In a letter dated 17 April 1596 the Danish king entreated Icelanders to give Arngrímur Jónsson antiquities, information about documents and copies of them in their possession. In 1597 Arngrímur sent his writings on the history of Scandinavia to Niels Krag (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 14). In 1602 he again went to Copenhagen, now bringing with him the manuscripts of two works, *Crymogæa* and *Groenlandia*, the first of which he showed Venusin, then royal historiographer, and Bishop Hans Poulsen Resen (1561–1638), the grandfather of Peder Hansen Resen (1625–88), who was later to publish the first edition of Snorri's *Edda* (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 16). Hans Poulsen Resen was at that time rector of the University of Copenhagen.

Crymogæa was one of the main reasons for Ole Worm's (1588–1655) interest in Icelandic studies, and from 1626 he and Arngrímur Jónsson corresponded frequently (Jakob Benediktsson 1957: 72). Arngrímur also supplied Worm with a manuscript in his possession containing Snorri's *Edda*, the so-called Codex Wormianus (Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 242 fol.). Another Danish contact was Stephanus Stephanius (1599–1650), who at the time was preparing the first philological edition of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, published with a lengthy commentary, *Notæ uberiores* ('More Abundant Notes') (1644–45). Even before direct contact was made between them, Stephanius had included a reprint of the first part of Arngrímur's *Crymogæa* in his own work on Danish and Norwegian kings, *De regno Daniæ et Norvegiæ* ('Concerning the Kingdom of Denmark and Norway') (1629). With his scholarly publications and his correspondence with learned colleagues in Denmark, Arngrímur Jónsson became, in Jakob Benediktsson's words, 'the centre of an exchange between Iceland and the outside world', and from this position he was able to lay 'the foundations on which for a very long period all Icelandic studies abroad were to be based' (1957: 71).

Brynjólfur Sveinsson

Another Icelandic pioneer was Brynjólfur Sveinsson (1605–75). As a student at the University of Copenhagen, from 1624–29, he attended Ole Worm's lectures. Having been unsuccessful in obtaining a position in Iceland during his stay there from 1629 to 1631, Brynjólfur returned to Denmark, and in 1632 was appointed conrector in Roskilde, probably through Bishop Hans Poulsen Resen's influence. In 1638, during a short trip to Iceland, he was

elected bishop of Skálholt, even though he asked to be excepted. Unlike Arngrímur Jónsson, he did not publish extensively, although through his handwritten commentaries, often cited by others, he had a great influence upon scholars in Denmark. He was well known not only for his erudition but also for his fine collection of Icelandic manuscripts (Gunnar Harðarson 2006: 204). It is not known exactly when he began his manuscript collection. In 1639 he presented Stephanius with a manuscript containing Snorri's *Edda*, the so-called Codex Upsaliensis: Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, MS DG 11 (Faulkes 1977b: 24). He also gave him a manuscript containing *Grettis saga* (Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, MS DG 10) and a compilation containing *Jónsbók,* among other texts (Uppsala, Uppsala University Library, MS DG 9) (Grape 1962–77: I, 16). Stephanius, however, made no use of the Codex Upsaliensis in his commentary on Saxo. In 1641, Brynjólfur Sveinsson further sent Stephanius notes and observations on the *Præfatio* and the first two books of the *Gesta Danorum*, which Stephanius used in his commentary. References to the hypotheses of Brynjólfur Sveinsson occur there in several places. In 1642, Torfi Jónsson translated *Vǫlsunga saga* at the bishop's request (Gunnar Harðarson 2006: 204), and in 1645 Brynjólfur further sent Stephanius a copy of the newly discovered Codex Regius of the eddic poems (Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute of Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 2365 4to). The copy, however, arrived too late to be included in Stephanius's Saxo commentary (Faulkes 1977b: 76).

From 1656 to 1662, Brynjólfur Sveinsson gave many generous gifts to the Royal Library in Copenhagen. At least fifteen important Icelandic manuscripts in this library derive from Bishop Brynjólfur. In 1662 he sent the originals of the Codex Regius of the eddic poems and of Snorri's *Edda* (MS GKS 2365 4to and Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute of Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 2367 4to) to Denmark as a present to the Danish king, Frederik III, along with five other medieval manuscripts. The royal historiographer in Denmark at that time was the Icelander Thormod Torfæus (Danicized from Þormóður Torfason, 1636–1719) who had travelled to Iceland in 1662 with a letter from the king, dated 27 May 1662 (Oddgeir Stephensen and Jón Sigurðsson 1853: 269). In this letter, the king had requested the Icelandic bishops at Skálholt and Hólar to assist his emissary Torfæus by either selling or giving him *Antiquiteter, Rariteter og Curiositeter paa Island* ('Antiquities, Rarities, and Curiosities in Iceland'). Brynjólfur Sveinsson's despatch of these important manuscripts to Denmark by the agency of Torfæus was provoked by this letter.

While working on his edition of the *Gesta Danorum* and its commentary, Stephanius had realized the importance of Old Icelandic texts as comparative

sources for Saxo, and it is indeed not unlikely that it was through the Danish historian's fascination with this material that Brynjólfur Sveinsson developed an interest in Old Norse antiquities. However, Stephanius and his colleagues in Denmark, Ole Worm and Peder Hansen Resen, would not have been able to study the Old Icelandic sources if it had not been for the help of Arngrímur Jónsson, Brynjólfur Sveinsson and other Icelanders, who translated texts for them, provided them with manuscripts and wrote commentaries on Old Icelandic texts and subjects.

Thanks to the help of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Stephanius was the first person ever to print stanzas from *Vǫluspá* in his *Notæ uberiores* (cf. Lassen 2013: 11–12). The stanzas were printed as an early example of the Old Icelandic version of the myth of Baldr's death — differing from Saxo's version. In notes and comments that Brynjólfur Sveinsson sent to Stephanius, he also put forward different theses on Old Norse matters. Brynjólfur was, for example, the first to propose that the name of Óðinn in the medieval sources covered two or more original historical persons (Schepelern 1978: 49). This rationalistic explanation of the divergent and often euhemeristic accounts of Óðinn in the many different medieval texts prevailed among scholars of Old Norse history and religion until the beginning of the nineteenth century (cf. Lassen 2011b: 35–47). Other hypotheses of Brynjólfur Sveinsson were disseminated through Resen's edition of Snorri's *Edda*, which was published twenty years after *Notæ uberiores*, in 1665. In his Preface Resen discussed the title *Edda* and its meaning. In this connection, he related a hypothesis, which originally derived from Brynjólfur Sveinsson, that Snorri's *Edda* is a younger and revised version of an originally much larger and older poetical *Edda*, written by Sæmundr fróði Sigfússon (1056–1133), and that the poem *Hávamál* represents the words of Óðinn himself, or (to be more precise) the youngest Óðinn of the three Óðinns, that is, the Óðinn Upsaliensis.

Brynjólfur Sveinsson was, however, not the only Icelandic source of information in Resen's preface, which was also based on a commentary on *Vǫluspá* by Guðmundur Andrésson (1615–54), to whom Resen also justly gives credit. Guðmundur Andrésson was, in turn, inspired by a *disputatio* written by Runólfur Jónsson (1619–54) (Copenhagen 1651; *Edda 1787–1828*: I, x; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 151), an Icelander who around this time was made rector in Kristiansstad. Just like Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Guðmundur Andrésson believed that the preserved *Vǫluspá*, 'Woluspaa hin skemre/ Voluspa minor', was an abridged version of an originally longer poem, 'Woluspaa en meire/ Voluspa major', now lost (Faulkes 1977a: h 2^{v}; Guðmundur Andrésson 1977: c 1^{v}).

Magnús Ólafsson's Laufás Edda

Resen's original contributions to his edition of Snorri's *Edda*, *Edda Islandorum* ('*Edda* of the Icelanders'), were limited. On the title page it is stated that Snorri's *Edda* here *nunc primum islandice, danice et latine ex antiquis codicibus mss. bibliothecæ regis et aliorum in lucem prodit* ('for the first time appeared in Icelandic, Danish and Latin on the basis of ancient manuscripts from the libraries of the king and others'). This assertion was, however, not entirely true. Resen's *Edda Islandorum* was based, with only a few changes, on a post-medieval redaction of Snorri's *Edda*, the so-called *Laufás Edda*, made in 1608–09 by the priest and poet Magnús Ólafsson (1573–1636). Magnús Ólafsson based his redaction on the aforementioned Codex Wormianus, at the request of Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648), who also lent him the manuscript. According to Anthony Faulkes, the purpose of the new redaction was to bring the contents of Snorri's *Edda* up to date (Faulkes 1979: 15–16; Finnur Jónsson 1918: 25–27). It is not known why Arngrímur Jónsson chose Magnús Ólafsson for the task (Sverrir Tómasson 1996: 69).

In *Laufás Edda* Snorri's text is divided into two parts (*Dæmisögur ok kenningar*) and the narratives are arranged according to chapters, called *dæmisögur* ('exemplary stories'), while the *heiti* ('[descriptive] names') and *kenningar* are rationalized and alphabetized according to significance. The medieval text is thus restructured in the style of a contemporary handbook for poets. But Magnús Ólafsson also shortened the text, and summarized and explained parts of it. He introduces his *Edda* with a short paragraph entitled *Hvat er Edda* ('What is Edda'), where its intended purpose as a handbook of poetics for contemporary skalds is evident:

> Edda er ein jþrött af forndicktudum frodra manna dæmisogum og margfvndnvm heitum hlutanna kennandj norrænan skalldskap fyrer alþijdu mirkkuedinn, enn fyrer vitrum monnum listkuedinn ad yrkia: huor jþrott, sem oþriotandj vatzbrunnr, færer fornar kenningar og fæder ætijd nyar til kvedskaparins ollum merkis skälldum er hana vilia med jdni grvnda, og gegniliga vid hafa, hvar af hvn eirnen sitt nafn hlotid hefur, þui Edda dregst af ordj latinsku Edo eg yrki eda dikta. (*Laufás-Edda*, Faulkes 1979: 189)

> (Edda is the art of the fables composed in ancient times by learned men and of the names of things that occur widely (in poetry), and it teaches Old Norse poetics, which is obscure to the common people, but in the eyes of learned men artful in diction. The said art form, like a perpetual water fountain, provides ancient *kennings* and gives birth constantly to new ones, for all great poets, who are willing to consider its diligent use and advantageous employment. Wherefrom it has also

received its name, since *Edda* is derived from the Latin word *Edo*, I compose poetry or express in verses.)

In 1609, Magnús Ólafsson sent a copy of his redaction of *Edda* to Arngrímur Jónsson, who, however, never seems to have made much use of it (Faulkes 1979: 29). But *Laufás Edda* nevertheless became very popular because of its user-friendliness for contemporary readers in contrast to the medieval redactions. Soon after Magnús Ólafsson had finished it, *Laufás Edda* was copied and disseminated, primarily in Iceland, but already in the seventeenth century copies were also brought to Denmark (Bishop Hans Poulsen Resen owned a copy) and to Sweden. Today, *Laufás Edda* survives in over a hundred manuscripts in libraries in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Great Britain (Faulkes 1979: 17, 26), that is, in more copies than any of the medieval redactions. It is arguably one of the most copied books in Iceland from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In 1628–9 Magnús Ólafsson translated his *Edda* into Latin at the request of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason (1597–1656), who had been asked by the Danish chancellor and patron of letters, Christian Friis (Faulkes 1979: 17–18), to provide a translation. In Resen's edition, the Icelandic text is accompanied by both Danish and Latin translations. As early as 1642 Stephanius was preparing Magnús Ólafsson's Icelandic text for publication with a translation, and during work on his commented edition of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* he received Magnús Ólafsson's Latin translation of his *Edda*. Ole Worm, however, argued in a letter he sent to Stephanius that an edition of Snorri's *Edda* ought to be based on the Codex Wormianus. But Stephanius — and later Resen — were convinced that Magnús Ólafsson's contemporary redaction provided the best text for an edition of Snorri's *Edda*.

Göransson's Edda

An authentic medieval redaction of Snorri's *Edda* was not printed until 1746, almost one hundred years after the publication of Resen's *Edda Islandorum*, when the Swedish pastor Johan Göransson published in Uppsala the text of the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* from the Codex Upsaliensis under the title *De yfverborna Atlingers, eller, Sviogötars ok Nordmänners, Edda* ('The Edda of the Hypoborean People of the Atlantic, or of the Sweo-Gothic or Norse People'). After his death in 1650, Stephanius's widow had put her husband's manuscript collection up for sale, and it was finally acquired by the Swedish count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie (Grape 1962–77: I, 18–19), who in 1662 handed the col-

lection over to the university library of Uppsala. Though Göransson's edition is mainly based on the Codex Upsaliensis, he also consulted a transcript of the manuscript made by the Icelandic scholar Guðmundur Ólafsson (Göransson 1746: xxxiii), who was active in Sweden. Unlike Resen, Göransson appears to have prepared the edition himself.

This edition became notorious for distorting and maltreating the Icelandic language, not to mention the support it expressed for far-fetched Rudbeckian ideas (cf. Chapter 3.1 above; Grape 1962–77: I, 42). In the introduction, Göransson first informs his readers that 'Edda' is another name for Sif, the daughter of Freyja, who for a long period was in hiding, because she had misinformed the people about *Alfǫðr* ('All Father'), who had created the whole world. The writer of the introduction — Göransson himself — then sought her out, taught her Swedish and gathered proof of her place of birth, age and so forth (1746: iii). The discussion of the *Edda* in the introduction is short and superficial. Göransson set out to prove that ancient Scythia was in Europe, that Scythians, Gethics and Goths were one and the same people, and that they had emigrated from Sweden. Further, he claimed that the Scythians had settled in Sweden after the confusion of languages at Babel, and so on. Before finally discussing the dialogue between Gylfi and Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði, whom Göransson identified as the last of the three Óðinns, picking up a hypothesis originally advanced by Guðmundur Andrésson (discussed further below) that Sæmundr fróði transcribed the eddic poems from runes into the Roman alphabet. Göransson added his opinion that Snorri's *Edda*, too, was originally written in runes and later transcribed into roman characters. In Göransson's belief, runic books had been systematically burnt after the conversion to Christianity, though a number of them were salvaged and brought to Iceland, where they survived until they were transcribed by men such as Sæmundr fróði and Snorri Sturluson (1746: xxxii). According to Göransson, the *Edda* dates back to the time of Moses. He was furthermore convinced that the language of the Codex Upsaliensis was different from that of Resen's *Edda*:

> Götiskan uti detta ok Resenii Manuskripter äro ganska olika. Ty Resenii Böker äro uti språket myket lika Isländskan; men uti denna vår Handskrefna Bok är Språket enehanda, med det här i Riket på gamla Runstenar förvarade Språket. (1746: xxxiv).
>
> (The Gothic language of this and of Resen's manuscripts is quite dissimilar. Indeed, Resen's books are in language very similar to Icelandic, while in this handwritten book of ours the language is one and the same with the language preserved on runestones here in this country.)

Hence Göransson's title, *Edda* of Sweo-Goths or Norsemen, not *Edda* of Icelanders, *Edda Islandorum*, which was Resen's title (1746: xxxv). Moreover, Göransson's translation was intended to demonstrate the affinity of the old Gothic language of the Codex Upsaliensis with contemporary Swedish by following the original very closely and rendering it almost word for word (1746: xxxvi). At the same time, he reintroduced obsolete orthography, that is, 'ok' for 'och', in an attempt to purge alien spelling from Swedish, supposedly introduced to Sweden by foreigners (1746: xxxvii). This method of translation became notorious, since it made some passages of Göransson's Swedish version very difficult to comprehend (Grape 1962–77: I, 45–46).

Göransson not only polemicized against Resen by changing the title of Snorri's work, he even claimed that the *Edda* was not Icelandic at all. Partial to the medieval manuscript he was publishing, from a Swedish library, he stressed that Resen had not consulted the best manuscripts and argued that, unlike the Uppsala *Edda*, the manuscripts in Denmark (the Codex Wormianus and MS GKS 2367 4to) contained interpolations which impaired the 'true value' of Snorri's *Edda* (1746: xxxiv–xxxv).

Interest in Eddic Poems and Snorri's Edda

Before Brynjólfur Sveinsson acquired the Codex Regius of the eddic poems in 1643, they appear to have been virtually unknown. After the rediscovery, a great amount of copying activity began. Icelandic clerics copied the Codex Regius for foreign scholars, and they made studies and translations of the poems. Among the first Icelandic scholars to write commentaries on *Vǫluspá* were Björn at Skarðsá (1574–1655), Runólfur Jónsson (1620–54) and Guðmundur Andrésson (1615–54). We also have a letter to Thormod Torfæus from the priest and poet Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–74), dated to 1671, containing a short commentary on *Vǫluspá* (Lassen 2013: 11), made at the request of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson. It is furthermore possible that Jón lærði 'the Learned' Guðmundsson (1574–1658) wrote his own commentary on *Vǫluspá*, even though such a work has not survived (Einar G. Pétursson 1998: 133). The first eddic poems to attract the attention of scholars in the seventeenth century were *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*. *Vǫluspá* was believed by some scholars to be the oldest work in the entire eddic corpus, even older than Snorri's ancient 'Asians' (according to Björn at Skarðsá, Lbs 818 4to, fol. 63^{r}, and Runólfur Jónsson 1651; cf. *Edda 1787–1828*: I, x; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 151). *Hávamál*, however, received special attention because of its runic wisdom.

Björn Jónsson at Skarðsá

Björn Jónsson was a farmer and a *lögréttumaður*, a petty officer in the Icelandic justice system. Even though he had never completed his education, he was at the heart of early Humanism in Iceland. He had probably acquired a little Latin in his youth, since he was acquainted with learned studies written by contemporary scholars (such as Ole Worm's *Litteratura runica* ('Runic Literature'), which he refers to in his commentary on Egill Skallagrímsson's *Hǫfuðlausn* in Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS Rask 87). Björn Jónsson was an active scholar, copied manuscripts and produced a great variety of scholarly works, which have been preserved in manuscripts: annals, commentaries on law, Eddas and sagas. He was patronized by Brynjólfur Sveinsson, who paid him to write *Skarðsannáll* (Love 2013: 260), and, probably at the request of Arngrímur Jónsson, he compiled a redaction of *Landnámabók*, the so-called Skarðsárbók redaction (Jakob Benediktsson 1958: viii).

Björn Jónsson's commentary on the poetic and prose *Edda*, *Útleggingar Björns á Skarðsá yfir Eddu*, is preserved in several manuscripts, including Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, MS Lbs 818 4to. The commentary was written in 1644 or 1646 (Einar G. Pétursson 1998: I, 412). According to information found in MS Lbs 818 4to, he wrote his commentary in 1644. Björn Jónsson there argues that even the 'Asians' of Snorri's *Gylfaginning* considered *Vǫluspá* to be an ancient poem. This suggests that he read *Gylfaginning* as an historical account and regarded the Asians as historical persons. According to his interpretation, stories and motifs from the *Eddas* are representations of biblical matter and the various historical accounts of Troy. His overall method of interpretation is consistent with the ideas presented in Snorri's *Edda*. According to Björn Jónsson, Miðgarðr is Trójuborg, and he argues that *ragnarǫk* is an analogue to the burning of Troy (MS Lbs 818 4to, fol. 65^{r}) or the conflagration of the world on Judgement Day. He notes how Scripture states that when the angel comes with his sword from the south, the world is destroyed (MS Lbs 818 4to, fol. 63$^{r–v}$). The many dwarfs in *Vǫluspá* are interpreted as descendants of Noah, who took part in the building of the Tower of Babel and settled at the edges of the world, where they lived in underground caves (MS Lbs 818 4to, fol. 66^{v}). In his commentary on *Gylfaginning*, Björn also argues that in their account of the creation of the first human beings, the 'Asians' had the Christian Trinity in mind.

Runólfur Jónsson

The first Humanist to write a grammatical treatise was Runólfur Jónsson, *Lingvæ septentrionalis elementa tribus assertionibus* ('Elements of the Northern Tongue in Three Declarations'), which was printed in Copenhagen in 1651 and defended at the university the same year. Runólfur Jónsson quotes stanzas from *Hávamál* and from Snorri's *Edda*. He takes Snorri's *Edda* at face value and believes Óðinn was an Asian immigrant, living at the time of the Roman general and statesman Pompey the Great (106–48 BC), who brought with him to the North both language and poetry. This information is in accordance with the contents of *Ynglinga saga* and the Prologue of Snorri's *Edda* in the Codex Wormianus (cf. Chapters 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Runólfur Jónsson considers *Vǫluspá* to be the oldest poem of them all. One of his arguments for the great age of *Vǫluspá* is that Hár often refers to and quotes from this poem as an older text in *Gylfaginning* — a line of argument that is in accordance with Björn Jónsson's view above. As for *Hávamál*, this poem was thought to represent the discourse of Óðinn, although not to be as old as *Vǫluspá*.

Guðmundur Andrésson

As previously mentioned, Runólfur Jónsson's dissertation influenced the *Vǫluspá* commentary of Guðmundur Andrésson, a commentary which was used by Resen in *Edda Islandorum*. Guðmundur Andrésson's course of life and entry into learned circles in Denmark was highly unusual. In Iceland he was charged for having criticized in writing the Icelandic law code *Stóridómur*, a law against such ethical crimes as premarital sex and incest, which was adopted in 1564 to replace sections of canon law nullified by the Reformation. When he pleaded for the king's mercy, he was moved to Copenhagen, where he was imprisoned in Blåtårn, 'The Blue Tower'. In Copenhagen, Runólfur Jónsson and Páll Hallsson, who were then students at the University of Copenhagen, translated his writings against *Stóridómur* into Latin in order for the university professors to be able to judge definitively in his case. It was probably due to the goodwill of Professor Ole Worm that Guðmundur Andrésson was eventually freed, even though he was never allowed to return to Iceland. In 1650, at around forty years of age, he was enrolled at the University of Copenhagen. Soon after, he began to write scholarly works, and before he died of the plague in 1654 he had written commentaries on Icelandic antiquities and an Icelandic–Latin dictionary, *Lexicon Islandicum*, which was published by Resen after his death in 1683.

Resen made use of Guðmundur Andrésson's commentary on *Vǫluspá*, referring to him a couple of times, and in the *Notæ* that follow the Latin translation of *Vǫluspá*, he printed Guðmundur Andrésson's commentary *in extenso*, naming him as the author of the commentary.[2] The translation of the poem on the preceding pages (and the notes on the poem in the same place) are meanwhile attributed by Resen to the poet and priest Stefán Ólafsson (1619–88). In the comments on Resen's *Edda*, *Vǫluspá* is placed in the generic context of the Sibylline prophecies. The *vǫlva*, or 'Vola', as she is named in Resen's *Edda*, is said to be identical to the Eritrean Sibyl in Asia (Faulkes 1977a: H 1^{r}). This hypothesis had first been put forward by Runólfur Jónsson in his *disputatio* in Copenhagen in 1651 (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, x; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 151). According to Guðmundur Andrésson, the word *Vola* is itself derived from the ancient term 'Sibyl' (Guðmundur Andrésson 1977: C 1^{r}). The Eritrean Sibyl is said to have been the most ancient and the noblest of all sibyls, and Resen informs us that she is commonly believed to have lived before the sack of Troy (Faulkes 1977a: H 1^{v}). The subject matter of the Sibylline prophecies is then described by Resen as prophecies of the coming of Christ and Antichrist, the crimes of Rome, the end of Antichrist, Judgement Day, and so forth (Faulkes 1977a: H 1^{v}; cf. Lassen 2013). Resen proceeds to inform his readers that the Sibyl is mentioned in the Prologue of Snorri's *Edda*, where he speaks of the descendants of Munon/Mennon and a son of Priam of Troy, namely, Hár: 'In the northern part of the world there was a certain woman, a prophetess or a sibyl, called Sif; no one knew her origins' | 'In the northern part of the world he found a prophetess, who was called Sibyl, whom we call Sif, and he married her'.[3] Thus readers are given to understand that the Sibyl from Troy was well known to the medieval Nordic people under the name of Sif.

Guðmundur Andrésson's hypothesis about the Sibyl is in many ways an updated version of the learned interpretation of the pagan gods in Snorri's *Edda*. Snorri's Prologue informs the reader of how the 'Asians' were descended from Troy and settled in the North. And in the so-called epilogue of Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (another part of his *Edda*), Snorri adds that the accounts of the

[2] *Gudmundi Andreæ Islandi* | *Notæ seu levis Paragraphus in expli-*|*cationem super Versus Sibyllinos seu Philosophiam (Wölu Spá) Nor-*|*vego-Danicam* ('The Icelander Guðmundur Andrésson's notes or light glosses for the explication of the Sibylline Verse or Norwegian-Danish Philosophy (Wölu Spá)').

[3] *In plaga Septentrionali faemina qvaedam erat fatidica seu Sibylla, nomine Sif; ejus nemo progeniem noverat* (H 2^{r}); *I Nordur alffu Heimsins fann hann Spákonu* | *thá er Sybil hiet er vier kollum Siff og fieck hennar* (A 4^{r}).

'Asians', Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði, are little more than distortions of the tales of Troy (cf. Chapter 2.2.1). In this context, it is worth noting that one of Runólfur Jónsson's arguments for the great age of *Vǫluspá* was that Hár often refers to and quotes from this poem as an older text in *Gylfaginning* (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, x; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 151). In the epilogue of *Skáldskaparmál*, *ragnarǫk* is also directly interpreted as the burning of Troy, and the killing of Óðinn by the wolf is seen to reflect the killing of the king of Troy by Pirrus (Neoptolemus), son of Achilles. If we follow the identification of the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* with the Eritrean Sibyl who lived in Troy before its destruction, the *vǫlva* would have belonged to approximately the same generation of Trojans as Óðinn and Hár who, according to Snorri, fled after the destruction of Troy and settled in the North (Guðmundur Andrésson 1977: C 1^{v}). Her prophetic poems would thus have survived among these 'Asians' in much the same way that Runólfur Jónsson and Resen imagined that *Hávamál* survived. This poem was considered to preserve the words of Óðinn himself rather than being something composed by a later poet in the form of a statement by Óðinn. In this connection, it must be mentioned that Guðmundur Andrésson believed that there were two 'Woluspaas', a greater *Vǫluspá* and a lesser *Vǫluspá* (Faulkes 1977a: H 2^{v}; Guðmundur Andrésson 1977: C 1^{v}). To Guðmundur Andrésson's mind, the *Vǫluspá* preserved in Snorri's *Edda* is the shorter version, while he believed that the longer and more original version had been lost. According to him, *Vǫluspá* had been transmitted in runic letters, a subject we shall return to below, while Stefán Ólafsson, for his part, believed that the eddic poems had been passed down orally until Sæmundr fróði committed them to vellum (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, ix; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 149).

Manuscript Collections of Eddic Poetry: The Sæmundar Eddur

As mentioned above scholars such as Arngrímur Jónsson and Brynjólfur Sveinsson gave their colleagues in Denmark medieval manuscripts, but they also saw to it that a great deal of copying activity was undertaken in Iceland. Arngrímur Jónsson, for example, initiated Magnús Ólafsson's *Laufás Edda*, and there was immense copying activity going on in Skálholt in the time of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, soon after the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda had been discovered in 1643. Learned Icelanders began to copy the eddic poems and produce manuscripts that since then either remained in Iceland or were presented or sold to philologists and historians in Denmark, Sweden and beyond. Notes in these manuscripts reveal how learned men in Iceland were

continually seeking out and compiling the best and most complete collections of eddic poems.[4]

Brynjólfur Sveinsson and his contemporaries assumed that the poems of the Codex Regius were only a small part of a vast collection originally compiled by Sæmundr fróði Sigfússon. They were therefore prone to accept new discoveries of ancient poetry rather uncritically, since they were anticipating that further poems from this vast hypothetical collection would turn up. Not much is known for certain about Sæmundr fróði; it is known that he wrote a saga of Norwegian kings, which has, however, not survived. He was educated in Europe, where he stayed, according to *Jóns saga helga* (Foote 2003: 72–75), until Jón Ǫgmundarson sought him out and brought him back to Iceland. When Sæmundr returned to Iceland he became an influential priest at Oddi in the south. In the early Humanist period in Iceland the memory of Sæmundr fróði inspired people's imagination, and a cluster of folk-tales was centred around his figure. In these tales Sæmundr again and again encounters the devil, the rather naïve *kölski*, who was also the schoolmaster at the 'Black School' where Sæmundr was educated. Sæmundr, of course, defeats the devil with his cunning and intellect (cf. Jón Árnason 1954: I, 475–84).

The folk-tales about the intellectual superiority of Sæmundr fróði even found their way into early Humanist scholarship. When Brynjólfur Sveinsson had had the newly discovered Codex Regius copied on parchment, he assigned to the copy the title *Edda Sæmundi multiscii* ('The Edda of Sæmundr the Very Learned') (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, vii; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 148). This title remained in use for a very long time, as is well known.[5] There were two main hypotheses about Sæmundr's involvement with the eddic poems: it was either believed that Sæmundr had collected the fables of skalds to prevent them from being lost, and therefore turned them into verse, assigning to the collection the title *Edda*, as Stefán Ólafsson thought; or it was believed that Sæmundr had only transcribed the eddic poems into the Roman alphabet from the runic letters in which they had been preserved, as Guðmundur Andrésson maintained, and that Sæmundr had thus not literally composed the poems himself (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, ix–x; Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 149–50). The latter opinion was followed by Resen and later by Göransson. This idea probably originated with

[4] Cf. Lassen 2011a: 26–80 for a description of *Sæmundar Eddur* containing *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* / *Forspjallsljóð*.

[5] According to information given to Árni Magnússon by Thormod Torfæus, the idea that Sæmundr was behind the collection of eddic poems may, however, predate Brynjólfur Sveinsson (Gottskálk Jensson 2008: 148).

Ole Worm, who had transcribed eddic as well as skaldic stanzas with runic letters in his *Literatura runica* (1636, 2nd edn 1651). The surviving collection of eddic poetry was believed to contain only a small fragment of a much larger collection no longer extant. This belief explains the eagerness of the Humanist scholars to discover new and unknown poems from this vast and partly lost collection in order to make the collection of eddic poems more complete.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the scribes and those who commissioned their work strove to create ever more complete collections of eddic poems. They not only included the poems in the Codex Regius, but also poems recorded in other manuscripts, like *Sólarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Baldrs draumar*, *Heiðreks gátur* and younger poems like *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* ('Óðinn's Ravens' Spell'). The attitude in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seems to have been that a good collection should include all known poems in eddic metres, whether or not they had been preserved in the Codex Regius.

The ordering of poems in some of the earliest copies of eddic poetry from the seventeenth century is different from that of the Codex Regius, where *Vǫluspá* is placed at the beginning of the collection. In some of the manuscripts from this period the scribes have placed *Sólarljóð* as the first poem of the collection, followed by *Hrafnagaldur Óðins / Forspjallsljóð*, and then, as the third poem, *Vǫluspá*. At the time it was believed that *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was an ancient poem, even though it has since been demonstrated that it is a post-medieval composition (cf. Lassen 2011a). The reason for this change of order is probably the idea that Sæmundr fróði was the poet of *Sólarljóð*. According to one of the fanciful folk-tales about Sæmundr, his corpse rose from his deathbed, after he had been dead for three days, and then recited *Sólarljóð*:

> Sæmundur andaðist 1133, en með hverjum atburðum höfum vær eigi heyrt, þó segja menn, að hann þridagaður hafi úr líkrekkjunni risið og þá kveðið þá drápu, er hans ljóða-Eddu er vön að fylgja og kallast Sólar-ljóð. (Jón Árnason 1954: 1, 475, from Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS AM 254 8vo, p. 346)
>
> (Sæmundur died in 1133, but we have not heard in what way, even though people say that when he had lain on his deathbed for three days, he rose and recited the poem, which usually accompanies his poetic Edda and is called *Sólarljóð*.)

Hrafnagaldur Óðins was probably placed after *Sólarljóð* because it was thought to provide a kind of introductory poem to the eddic collection as a whole, and a prelude to *ragnarǫk*, which was described in the following poem, *Vǫluspá* (cf. Lassen 2011a: 21). But in the course of time *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was

moved towards the end of the manuscripts, where it often stands along with other poems that were not in the Codex Regius.

The physical appearance of the manuscripts containing the *Sæmundar Eddur* bears witness to the variety of social contexts in which they were found and the prestige that in some cases was accorded to them. While some beautiful folios, bound and ornamented with gold, are preserved in Denmark, the property of some of the most notable Danes, among others the historiographers B. W. Luxdorph (1716–88), P. F. Suhm (1728–98) (both members of the Arnamagnæan Commission) and the book collector Count Otto Thott (1703–85), the manuscripts that are preserved in Iceland are, however, in quarto, and as a result of heavy use, wear and tear and poor preservation, in a poor state, unbound and fragmentary. The sumptuous folios show how highly regarded the eddic poems were among those with antiquarian interests in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Every antiquarian in the eighteenth century would probably have wished to have had a volume of this kind standing among his books.

Árni Magnússon, too, was interested in the eddic poems. In his *Vita Sæmundi multiscii*, which was written *c.* 1690 but not published until 1787 as a preface to the first volume of the Arnamagnæan edition of the Poetic Edda (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, i–xxviii; Gottskálk Jensson 2008), Árni argued convincingly against the idea that Sæmundr could have been the author of the eddic poems. Árni Magnússon's interest in the eddic poems must have been motivated by, among other things, his research into Sæmundr fróði, which, however, first appeared in print some time after his death. At the time of the fire in Copenhagen in 1728 Árni Magnússon possessed — and lost — no less than fifteen manuscripts that contained eddic poems (see Bugge 1867: lxii).

The Poetic Revival of Nordic Mythology

A number of antiquarian poems from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries bear witness to the renewed general interest in eddic poetry which — along with the scholarly interest — sprang from the rediscovery of eddic poems through the discovery of the Codex Regius, as well as the user-friendly redaction of Snorri's *Edda*, *Laufás Edda*. In the same period, scribes and scholars, furthermore, composed stanzas that were inserted into authentically medieval eddic poems like *Hávamál* and *Baldrs draumar*.

Hrafnagaldur Óðins / Forspjallsljóð

Hrafnagaldur Óðins (*Forspjallsljóð*, 'Preface') is quite a short poem (twenty-six eight-line stanzas) in the eddic metre *fornyrðislag*, composed by an anonymous poet. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was considered to be one of the oldest, most important and most enigmatic of all eddic poems, but since Sophus Bugge's edition (1867), it has generally been considered post-medieval and no longer to belong to the sources of Old Norse mythology. The poem simply disappeared from scholarly works on the mythology and anthologies of eddic poetry after Bugge convincingly argued that it was a post-medieval poem (cf. Lassen 2011a). The many manuscripts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* is preserved reflect the immense Humanist interest in the poem: it is transmitted in no less than thirty-seven copies.[6]

The poem describes an unsuccessful journey to seek wisdom. After the description of an apparently ominous dream, Óðinn sends Heimdallur, Loki and Bragi off to find Iðunn to enquire of her about the future, but she can give no reply and weeps, apparently losing all bodily strength. Loki and Heimdallur return to the gods, who are sitting at a merry drinking feast with Óðinn and the other gods, with neither answer nor solution, and the poem concludes with the gods retiring for the night. It ends with the day breaking and Heimdallur blowing his horn.

Hrafnagaldur Óðins was probably composed in the wake of the enormous interest in collections of eddic poems that arose immediately after the rediscovery of the Codex Regius in 1643. It is probably to be associated with the learned circle around Brynjólfur Sveinsson. That *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* cannot be much earlier than this is shown by, among other things, its use of the originally Greek proverb *nótt skal nema nýræða til* ('night shall be used for new counsels'), the spread of which in Western Europe is closely bound up with the Renaissance (see further Lassen 2011a: 18–20). It is possible, as mentioned above, that the poem could have been written as a preface to one of the many collections of eddic poems that were made after 1643. Some of the earliest known people to have made or acquired copies of the poem are Guðmundur Ólafsson (1652–95) and Ásgeir Jónsson (*c.* 1657–1707), who both studied in Skálholt from 1673 to 1677 and from 1674 to 1678 respectively. It is rather

[6] In addition, in Copenhagen, The Arnamagnæan Institute, MS AM 424 fol., there is Gunnar Pálsson's commentary on the poem, which was used by Guðmundur Magnússon in the Arnamagnæan edition of the eddic poems (*Edda 1787–1828*).

likely that the poem was composed at Skálholt during the early period of the revived interest in eddic poems. It may appear surprising that it quickly gained the reputation of being ancient, but that such a thing was possible is shown by the case of *Gunnarsslagur* ('Gunnarr's Tune'), to which we shall return below.

Eddic poems are often allusive, but *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* contains obscure expressions to an exceptional degree. It uses names, words and kennings that otherwise seldom appear, either in eddic poetry or elsewhere. The syntax is also much more reminiscent of skaldic poetry or *rímur* than eddic verse. The artificial syntax and the many kennings make it probable that the poet was more conversant with skaldic poetry and maybe especially with *rímur* than with eddic poetry. Most of the figures or places from the Norse mythological world that are used in kennings in *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* are mentioned in Snorri's *Edda* (cf. Lassen 2011a: 25–26). Moreover, there are a number of names in *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* that are otherwise only known from Snorri's *Edda* or later texts,[7] which shows that the poet must have known this work extremely well, and that he may have used it as a handbook while he was writing the poem. This compositional method would further explain the poem's antiquarian and learned character and the high incidence of kennings. The poet is likely to have had only a superficial knowledge of eddic poetry, since Snorri's *Edda* quotes only fragments of eddic poems in *Gylfaginning* and just a couple of eddic poems are transmitted in a more or less complete form in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda* (*Grottasǫngr* in the Codex Regius and *Rígsþula* in the Codex Wormianus). Even though Snorri quotes most of *Vǫluspá* and *Grímnismál*, he most often only quotes single stanzas or a few consecutive stanzas. Moreover, the poem's content is not in keeping with the mythological stories that we now have from the Middle Ages, and this is explicable if the poem is an antiquarian product, composed with the help of Snorri's *Edda* by a learned person in the wake of the general interest in eddic poems. The poet has probably been proud of and interested in the Icelanders' ancient poetic art, and probably got information from Snorri's *Edda* about kennings and mythological figures, from which he was able to construct his own narrative about Iðunn and the gods. The poem was probably never meant as a forgery. The composition of *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*

[7] These are: 1) Niflheimr, 2) Døkkálfar, 3) Bifrǫst (only in the form Bilrǫst in eddic poems), 4) Jóln/Jólnar (apparently only recorded in Snorri's *Edda* and a stanza (13/1) of *Háleygjatal* that is only transmitted in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*), 5) Nál, 6) Vingólf, 7) Hangatýr. In addition, there is the noun *dís*, which is found in both Snorri's *Edda* and *Heimskringla*, and finally *man(n)heim(a)r*, which is only recorded in *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla* and in the late *fornaldarsaga Hjálmþés saga ok Ǫlvis*.

is more likely to be an expression of the early Humanist and antiquarian interest in the ancient eddic art, in which learned Icelanders expressed pride in the first printed writings about Iceland.

Gunnarsslagur

While the anonymous *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was probably composed in the seventeenth century in the scholarly milieu around Skálholt, *Gunnarsslagur*, another post-medieval poem, which was written by the popular Icelandic poet Gunnar Pálsson, was composed in the eighteenth century, or to be more precise, in 1745 (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2008: 22–25). Even though the poem was never held in the same esteem as *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, it was for a long time discussed by scholars as to whether *Gunnarsslagur* might be a medieval poem and thus originally to have belonged to the vast collection of eddic poems which Sæmundr fróði was believed to have collected. The poem was — even though it was soon identified as a young poem, a stylistic experiment in the eddic genre by a skilled poet — long admired for its authentic eddic style.

Gunnarsslagur consists of twenty-one stanzas in the eddic metre *fornyrðislag*. The poem describes the hero Gunnarr in the snake-pit, with hands bound but feet free. When he gets a harp, he plays it beautifully with his feet (contrast *Atlakviða* 31/7–8, in which he plays the harp with his hands), and most of the stanzas are placed in the mouth of Gunnarr, who sings about his sister, Guðrún, married to the worst of men (Atli), who had invited Gunnarr and his brother to a feast but instead attacked them. Gunnarr will meet his destiny, but as he sings, he still laughs at Atli for not having obtained the Niflung gold, at Högni's laughter when he was cut to the heart, and at Atli's loss of many men. Gunnarr knows that he will be killed by the snakes, but he knows (he sings) that Guðrún will avenge him. At the end of the poem, he has sung all the snakes to rest, but not Atli's mother, who bites him in the guise of a snake. After *Gunnarsslagur* has ended a feast in Valhöll awaits Gunnarr.

A particular reason why people may have been inclined to believe that *Gunnarsslagur* was an ancient poem is the fact that a poem (or a song or piece of music) with the same title is mentioned in *Norna-Gests þáttr* in Flateyjarbók (Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS GKS 1005 fol.):

> tekr Gestr hǫrpu sína ok slær vel ok lengi um kveldit svá at ǫllum þykir unañ í at heyra ok slær þó Gunnarsslag bezt, ok at lyktum slær hann Guðrúnarbrǫgð inu fornu. Þau hǫfðu menn eigi fyrr heyrt. (Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68: I, 348)

> (In the evening, Gestr takes his harp and plucks the strings beautifully and for a long time so that everybody enjoys listening, and he plays *Gunnarsslagr* ('Gunnarr's Tune') most beautifully. In the end he plays the old *Guðrúnarbrǫgð* ('Guðrún's Move'), which people had not heard before.)

Scholars not surprisingly hoped that *Gunnarsslagur* was one of the otherwise lost poems from Sæmundr's collection. In one of the manuscripts in which *Gunnarsslagur* is transmitted, Copenhagen, The Royal Library, MS NKS 1877 4to, the poem is thus introduced with the words: *Ein af þeim töpuðu kviðum | Sæmundar-Eddu* ('One of the lost poems of Sæmundr's Edda').

Along with *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* the poem was printed in the second volume of the Arnamagnæan edition of eddic poems, which was published in 1818 (*Edda 1787–1828*: II, xxiv, 1001–10). The editor of the first volume, Guðmundur Magnússon, had discovered the poem while on a journey in Iceland in 1780. In the introduction to the second volume, Børge Thorlacius mentions a rumour to the effect that Gunnar Pálsson was the author of *Gunnarsslagur*. According to a letter by Árni Þorsteinsson in Norðurmúlasýsla to Guttormur Pálsson, Guðmundur Magnússon had found the poem in a manuscript, which was a copy of an older one. Árni Þorsteinsson, who owned this manuscript, had received it from Skafti Skaftason, who had said that the thirteen eddic poems in it were copies of an old original, which was previously in the possession of Sigurður Eiríksson, priest at Skeggjastaðir on Langanesströnd (d. 1768). If, Thorlacius wrote, *Gunnarsslagur* was in this manuscript, Gunnar Pálsson could not be the author. Árni Þorsteinsson, however, had also stated that his son had seen the poem in a collection of Gunnar Pálsson's poetry (*Edda 1787–1828*: II, xxv–xxvi). Thorlacius noted that late paper manuscripts, badly treated, could absorb smoke and humidity and thus to inexperienced eyes give false impressions of their age (*Edda 1787–1828*: II, xxvii).

One of the peculiar circumstances around *Gunnarsslagur* and its *editio princeps* in the Arnamagnæan edition is that Gunnar Pálsson corresponded frequently with the Arnamagnæan Commission about the eddic poems, providing detailed comments on them which are today preserved in MS AM 424 fol. Thorlacius wondered why Gunnar Pálsson had never sent *Gunnarsslagur* to the members of the Arnamagnæan Commission. According to Thorlacius, the reason might be either that he composed the poem himself, or that he had considered the poem a fraud, or, maybe, that he had wanted to find further proof of its authenticity. The editors were, indeed, not sure about the authenticity of the poem, although they published it in spite of their doubts. Soon after-

wards it was established that the poem had indeed been composed by Gunnar Pálsson. In his 1818 edition of eddic poetry, Rasmus Rask did not express any doubt about the authorship of the poem (Rask 1818: 274; Haukur Þorgeirsson 2008: 13–14). However, he chose to publish it on account of its poetic qualities, not because of its antiquity. In the second volume of Bishop P. E. Müller's *Sagabibliothek*, published the same year as Rask's edition of eddic poetry, Müller also stressed that the poem was young, but that its author had struck the authentic note of eddic poetry.[8] In 1867, in his edition of *Norræn fornkvæði*, Bugge finally noted that any doubt about the authorship could be dispelled by information provided to him by Guðbrandur Vigfússon, that *Gunnarsslagur* was found in a collection of poetry by Gunnar Pálsson (London, British Library, MS Add. 11192), dated to after 1777, where at the end of his poem he makes the following statement:

> Ég sendi þetta nýsmíðað þeim nafnkenda manni séra Eyjólfi á Völlum, er lét vel yfir og lagði þetta til síðast: jubeo te macte esse tanto in antiquitatibus nostris profectu; og ætla ég þetta hafi verið 1745–46. Sveini lögmanni sendi ég og exemplar [...] er mitt litla verk vel approberaði. Framar man ég eigi af að segja, enda máské tortýndur sé sá verki, þar mag. Hálfdan Einarsson hans eigi getur í sinni Sciagraphia hist. lit., en nefnir þó aðra mína smákveðlinga. G.P.S. (*Norræn fornkvæði* 1867: xlix)

> (I sent this (poem), just after I composed it, to the respectable Reverend Eyjólfur (Jónsson) of Vellir, who expressed his satisfaction with it, and added this at the end: I pray you, persevere in this great advancement of our antiquities; I suspect that this was in 1745–46. To Lawman Sveinn I also sent a copy [...] he spoke favourably of my small piece. More than that I cannot recall, indeed the work may have perished, since Magister Hálfdan Einarsson does not mention it in his *Sciagraphia Historiæ Literariæ* (*Islandicæ*), yet he mentions other small poems of mine. Gunnar Pálsson.)

Even though Gunnar Pálsson had never pretended that the poem was ancient, it was soon taken to be just that. In the same letter from Eyjólfur Jónsson he had actually written that if he had not known better, he would himself have thought that the poem rightly belonged to the corpus of medieval eddic poems (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2008: 24).

[8] See the survey of the reception of the poem in Haukur Þorgeirsson (2008: 15–17).

Rímur

Both *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Gunnarsslagur* are antiquarian poems composed by learned Icelanders with a great interest and pride in the eddic art. They are both learned attempts to compose poetry very similar to old eddic poems in *fornyrðislag*, and from their use of *heiti* and kennings it is evident that the poets had access to either Snorri's *Edda* and used it as a handbook or were well acquainted with eddic poems, as Gunnar Pálsson was. Alongside these learned attempts to revitalize eddic poetics, the mythological material in eddic poems had been used and circulated in probably less learned circles in at least four *rímur* from the end of the Middle Ages: *Lokrur*, *Þrymlur*, *Völsungsrímur* and *Skíðaríma*. Three of these, *Lokrur*, *Þrymlur* and *Völsungsrímur*, are based on eddic poems and/or Snorri's *Edda* (Sverrir Tómasson 1996;2012), while *Skíðaríma* (a parody of a *visio* in which an Icelandic vagrant is brought in his dream to Valhǫll, where he upsets all the gods and causes a great battle by making the sign of the cross) appears to be an independent composition which is probably younger than the other three *rímur*.[9]

Lokrur, *Þrymlur* and *Völsungsrímur* are all preserved in one of the oldest manuscripts containing *rímur*, the Staðarhólsbók (Reykjavík, The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, MS AM 604 4to), which is dated to 1540–60. This is, indeed, the only manuscript in which *Lokrur* and *Þrymlur* are preserved. Even though *rímur* were based in most cases on written sources, or stories that also existed in written form, the *rímur* based on eddic material cannot be regarded as antiquarian products in the same sense as *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Gunnarsslagur*. They are, furthermore, too old to fall within the Humanist period in Iceland. The *rímur* based on eddic material are examples of the late medieval afterlife of eddic poems and mythology and the reception and use of this by late medieval Icelanders. *Þrymlur*, which is also called *Óðins rímur*, is mainly based on *Þrymskviða*, but the poet has also made use of Snorri's *Edda*. It tells the story of Þórr's travel to the giant Þrymr and his disguise as the marriagable Freyja in order to get his hammer back. *Lokrur* is based on the story of Þórr's travel to Útgarðaloki in the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri's *Edda*. Finally, *Völsungsrímur*, about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and the Völsung family, is based upon Snorri's *Edda* and *Vǫlsunga saga*. These three *rímur* appear

[9] *Skíðaríma* is preserved in manuscripts from the eighteenth century but is already mentioned in the seventeenth century. It is traditionally believed to date from shortly before the Reformation, but a dating to the fifteenth century has also been suggested. Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 1999: 225.

to have functioned as pure entertainment, the descriptions of the characters are lengthened — and humorous — and the stories are transformed from eddic into *fornaldarsaga* style (cf. Sverrir Tómasson 1996: 30; Vésteinn Ólason 1999: 224).

There exist, however, examples of antiquarian *rímur* from the Humanist period, earlier than both *Þrymlur*, *Lokrur* and *Völsungsrímur*. This branch of *rímur* is only a minor part of the *rímur* corpus; examples are Eiríkur Hallson's (1614–98) *Ýmisríma* ('Ymir's *ríma*') and Þorsteinn Pálsson's (1764–1834) *Ásgarðsförin* ('The Ásgarðr Journey'). The latter *ríma*, preserved in Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, MS ÍBR 14 8vo, is quite a strange poem about the encounter of a Þorkell þunni ('the Thin') with Þórr and other Old Norse gods (including battle scenes) and is an independent story not based on a written source. *Ýmisríma*, however, is, according to Sverrir Tómasson, based upon Resen's *Edda* (1996: 82).[10] One of the earliest known attempts to comprehend *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* was made by Eiríkur Hallsson at Höfði, who was himself a priest and a renowned poet in his time. In the first volume of the Arnamagnæan edition of the eddic poems, Guðmundur Magnússon tells us (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, 204) that Eiríkur Hallsson had spent no less than ten years trying to understand this poem, after which he abandoned it in frustration, claiming that he still only understood a little of it. The story illustrates not only the difficulty of understanding *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* but also the immense antiquarian interest in the poem in Iceland in the seventeenth century. Eiríkur Hallsson was a poet of both psalms and *rímur*. His interest in Icelandic antiquity, which can be seen in *Ýmisríma* (Finnur Sigmundsson 1960), did, interestingly, not result in the composition of antiquarian eddic poems, like *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*. Instead, he chose the form of the probably most enduring genre of Icelandic poetry, the *rímur*, which were still thriving in his day.

Even though *Ýmisríma* was intended as pure entertainment,[11] Eiríkur Hallsson's poem is a learned Humanist hybrid of material gathered from Snorri's *Edda* and classical learning. The *ríma*, consisting of sixty-six stanzas, largely follows the account of creation as we know it from Snorri's *Edda*, but sometimes the poet makes comments and interprets the contents. For example, he remarks that one should rather praise the Christian than the pagan religion (st. 17). According to the *ríma*, Ýmir is born out of the four elements (st. 4). The com-

[10] According to Sverrir Tómasson (1996: 82), the poem is only preserved in a single manuscript from the end of the eighteenth century.

[11] In the first stanza it is described as *vísna litla kæti* ('entertainment of a little poem').

positional situation is also referred to in the poem: in the second stanza, the poet mentions the situation of composition: *Sit eg nú við sögunnar lestur*, | *sem hún Edda hreytir* ('I now sit and read a story, which Edda throws up'), and when the four dwarves are presented in the narrative, it is said that one of the dwarves *Austra kallar Edda þann* ('is called Austri by *Edda*'; st. 26). Along with a number of the pagan Nordic gods, we also encounter Graeco-Roman deities, something that may indicate that Eiríkur Hallsson was probably acquainted with the interpretation of the Nordic gods as parallels to the gods of the classical world (Sverrir Tómasson 1996: 83), as in stanza 49 where the poet mentions *Merkúriús eður Heimdall* ('Mercury or Heimdallur').

The *rímur* continued to be a productive genre in Iceland for many centuries. During the nineteenth century, in 1837, the Romantic poet Jónas Hallgrímsson, however, published a harsh critique in the journal *Fjölnir* of the *Tristransrímur* by the poet Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798–1846). Jónas was one of the so-called *Fjölnismenn*, the editors of the periodical *Fjölnir*. Sigurður Breiðfjörð did not reply to the critique in the form of *rímur*. Instead he replied in eddic style in a notebook, now preserved in Reykjavík, National and University Library of Iceland, MS LBS 2376 8vo, by composing — in *fornyrðislag* — a little poem about the anger of Óðinn: *Reiður var þá Óðinn* ('Then Óðinn Was Angry') (Sveinbjörn Sigurjónsson 1962). In this poem, consisting of ten stanzas, Sigurður Breiðfjörð describes the anger of Óðinn at the Fjölnismen for using Óðinn's holy name, Fjǫlnir. The poem is clearly inspired by both *Þrymskviða* and *Vǫluspá* — and, to sum it up, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*. Sigurður Breiðfjörð's little bagatelle in a notebook appears as a swan song, both for the *rímur* — since it is in eddic metre — and perhaps even for *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, which was soon after to disappear from the corpus of sources on Old Norse mythology.

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Part 4

From Humanism to the Romantics

4.1 – Myth and Religion in the Enlightenment and Pre-Romantic Period

Margaret Clunies Ross

> 'Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is man.'
>
> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man* (1733)

The European Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, as it is often termed, occupied what historians nowadays refer to as 'the long eighteenth century', a period between the middle of the seventeenth and the later eighteenth centuries. Many of the cultural changes associated with the Enlightenment can also be detected in the periods immediately before and after it, as the discussion in Chapter 4.3 below on the new aesthetics demonstrates. In general the Enlightenment involved a new way of thinking about the world and mankind's place in it, and thus influenced a great many areas of culture, including the modern fields we call politics, philosophy, religion, science and the arts. In many respects the Enlightenment precipitated the definition of these fields of knowledge as independent subjects of enquiry. Central to Enlightenment

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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thinking was its stress upon the necessity for mankind to use the power of reason to reform society and to challenge ideas and beliefs that had formerly been based largely in tradition and religious faith (see further Bristow 2011).

One of the chief subjects addressed by Enlightenment thinkers was the place of a divine being or beings in the natural world, which included human beings. Although self-knowledge, as expressed in Descartes's famous axiom *cogito, ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am'), was generally privileged over knowledge of God in Enlightenment thinking, there were relatively few who professed atheism. Yet, because it accorded centrality to the thinking human subject, the Enlightenment was characterized by a crisis of authority regarding religious belief. Deism was the form of belief most congenial to Enlightenment thinkers and the most frequently expressed. Deists held that the exercise of reason enabled humans to know that the universe was created and governed by a supreme spiritual being, who, furthermore, had had a plan for his creation from the beginning, though he did not interfere in its execution.

Some thinkers like Isaac Newton in his *Opticks* (1704) further presented the so-called argument from design for the existence of God, proposing that there must be an intelligent supreme being as the cause of the order and beauty observable in the natural world. Newton was not himself a deist, but his and other writers' arguments from design encouraged the popularity of this hypothesis and enabled the deist position to be held in conjunction with an interest in and study of the natural sciences.

Another important movement in Enlightenment thinking was towards a qualified kind of rationalism in terms of what could be called 'natural' religion. For thinkers like Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) in the Francophone world and Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713) in England, religion was founded on natural human sentiments that sprang from the individual's sense of gratitude to the deity for the beauty of his environment in the natural world rather than from rational thought alone. This way of thinking was often allied both with a Protestant belief in liberty of conscience and a strong interest in individual and social freedom and thus with political theories, like that of Baron de Montesquieu, in his *De l'Esprit des Lois* ('Concerning the Spirit of the Laws') (1748), that identified the kinds of societies and climates in which political freedom and democratic governments would flourish. Among other ideas, Montesquieu argued that geography and climate influenced the kinds of social organizations that humans developed. He associated cold climates and less fertile environments with more democratic societies in which individuals worked hard and respected the rule of law. Montesquieu's theories were to play an important part in Paul Henri Mallet's presentation of the early North

as just such a society in his highly influential *Histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) and *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes* (1756), as is discussed below in greater detail by Julia Zernack in Chapter 4.5.

In a curious way many of the most important ideas about religion that characterized Enlightenment thinking in Europe and the recently settled lands of North America had their parallel in some of the ideas about the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia to be found in medieval Norse sources, though they derived from quite different theoretical positions. These are the ideas about natural religions and the argument from design that was most clearly expressed in Old Norse in the Prologue to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, along with the notion that there was a single creator being (*stjórnari*, 'controller') who created and controlled the universe (see Chapter 2.1.1 above).

Perhaps the first writer to draw on this medieval metaphysical presentation and place it in a modern intellectual context was the Danish scholar Peder Hansen Resen, in the three-part Introduction to his *Edda Islandorum* of 1665 (Faulkes 1977a), where he discusses Norse myths and the poetry in which they are expressed in the context of other world religions, particularly the classical and Christian biblical traditions. This interest is not unexpected in a scholar whose expertise was in ethics and law rather than Old Norse poetry (Faulkes 1977b: 9–10), although Resen's decision to include two eddic poems, *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, as an appendix to *Snorra Edda* suggests an interest, confirmed particularly in the second part of his Introduction, in early Scandinavian vernacular religious and gnomic verse. Mats Malm (1996: 46–50) has shown that, to Resen, the Old Norse poetry and myths were important because they revealed the secrets (*aenigmata*) of creation in ways comparable to the early literatures of classical, Hebrew and Christian cultures, and thus were a part of world religion. In Resen's actual edition of *Snorra Edda* this perspective is confirmed through such headings as 'Fabel', 'Dæmesaga' and 'Mythologia' that distinguish its various parts.

Malm (1996) contrasted the metaphysical project of Resen with the more pragmatic focus on the Old Norse language and written texts of other seventeenth-century Danish scholars, like Ole Worm. Malm sees Thomas Bartholin's *Antiqvitatum danicarum [...] libri tres* (1689), as espousing both metaphysical and pragmatic interests in Old Norse poetry and myth, a dual focus that was almost inevitable at a time when the basic primary texts upon which the study of Old Norse myth and religion was founded were still in the process of publication and elucidation for the first time.

The application of Enlightenment ideas to Old Norse religion and mythology grew gradually during the eighteenth century. In Chapter 4.4 below Lars

Lönnroth shows how the Swedish author Olof Dalin applied Enlightenment concepts of universal religion and Deism to his interpretation of the religion of early Scandinavia in his *Svea Rikes Historia* ('History of the Nation of Sweden') (1747–61), while the most influential works of the eighteenth century to shape Western thinking about the pre-Christian religion and mythology of Scandinavia, Paul Henri Mallet's *Histoire* and *Monumens*, show the influence of several strands of Enlightenment thinking in the first editions of 1755–56. However, in the second edition of 1763, in which the two originally separate volumes are combined in a six-volume set, Mallet shows a changed appreciation of his subject matter. He appears there to have come under the influence of the aesthetic theories associated particularly with pre-Romantic writers like Edmund Burke in his *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (1757). Mallet now praises Old Norse poetry for its mythical imagination and sublime, passionate images, and is followed in this by many of those who read his books, often in translation from French into their own vernaculars (Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999: 15; see further Zernack in Chapter 4.5 below).

There were some aspects of Enlightenment thinking about religion that only slowly came to be applied to the Old Norse material, particularly the implication of the deist model that religion was universal and that each culture's manifestation of religious beliefs was a variation upon a common pattern. This mode of thought came to be applied more often to Scandinavian pre-Christian religions in the early nineteenth century, after knowledge of the relationships between languages and cultures of the Indo-European peoples became better known and the study of comparative religions had become established.

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4.2 – Pre-Christian Religions of the North and the Political Idea of Liberty

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

The most tenacious stereotype associated with the Germanic peoples — particularly the Vikings — in modern times is their alleged affinity for liberty. It also influences ideas about the pre-Christian religion of these peoples. This connection becomes tangible, for example, in the politically motivated appeal to a Germanic heritage that has accompanied the nation-building movements of several European countries since the nineteenth century. The mythology of the pre-Christian Nordic religion provides a wide range of motifs — which were of course only transmitted in the Christian era — from which symbols have been chosen to give emphasis to political demands for emancipation (but also to add authority to imperialistic claims). In this way the ancient belief that the origins of liberty are to be found in the North can be given contemporary relevance. Even today the democratic self-image of Scandinavians is informed by this liberty *topos* which received its classic expression in Charles-Louis de Montesquieu's famous treatise on the spirit of the laws (*De l'Esprit des Lois*) from 1748. Montesquieu (1689–1755) grants the Scandinavians precedence over all other peoples of the world because he regards them as the fount of liberty in Europe (bk xvii, ch. 5). A few years later, in 1755, the historian Paul Henri Mallet (1730–1807) connected this

Julia Zernack is Professor of Scandinavian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. She works on Old Norse literature, its post-medieval reception, the history of Old Norse Studies and modern Scandinavian literature.

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idea to the ancestral beliefs of these peoples. Indeed, it is significant for the later reception of Norse religion and mythology that it was introduced to the educated classes of Europe in the context of Montesquieu's concept of freedom.

Climate Theory and the Political Concept of Liberty

The idea of tracing the origin of liberty to the North originally derives from the view, which can be shown to have existed since the fourth century BC, that a people's character and appearance can be explained based on the influence of external factors: the climate and the environment (Rausch 2013: 92–99; Fink 2004). Centuries later, this notion was brought to wider attention by the French political philosopher Jean Bodin (1529/30–1596) and then above all by Montesquieu as *la théorie des climats*. Climate theory in all its variations assumes that one of the characteristic traits developed by peoples inhabiting regions of extreme cold is a love of liberty. This view is already found in Aristotle, who contrasts the liberty-loving but only moderately intelligent peoples of the cold regions with the smart and level-headed inhabitants of warmer areas, who, however, have a predisposition towards submission and slavery. The Greeks as inhabitants of a third, temperate climate lying between the two extremes are regarded as having the best of both worlds. Geographically, Aristotle combines the opposing climates of the peripheral regions with an east–west contrast embodied by Europe and Asia as places of liberty and despotism respectively, while the climate zone theory of Poseidonios in the first century BC implies a north–south orientation (Rausch 2013: 188–90).

In the context of climate theory, the North is from the outset identified as one of the two poles within an asymmetrical dichotomous structure. This later provides a model for criticizing the present that recurs in very different historical circumstances. Still within antiquity this can be seen in the work of the Roman historian Tacitus († *c.* 120), in which the concept of *libertas* is a central point (Morford 1991). Tacitus sets the virtues of republican liberty against the supreme authority, the sole reign of Roman emperors since Augustus (63 BC–14 AD), which appears to him as tyrannical. At the same time he marks out *libertas* as the most important quality of Rome's most dangerous enemies: the Germanic peoples. For his famous description of them in the *Germania*, Tacitus employs *topoi* from ancient ethnography, in particular ideas about Northern peoples (Krebs 2010). In this way he describes the Germanic tribes as undiluted, warlike barbarians, who still live in a state of original simplicity, distinguish themselves through bravery, morality and a love of liberty and possess liberal institutions such as an elective monarchy and a people's assembly.

Tacitus interprets those aspects of the Germanic peoples that appear uncivilized in comparison with Rome in a positive fashion as a primal unspoiled quality, which he regards as sign of their moral superiority over the Romans.

This concept of an indigenous collective liberty which stands in opposition to tyranny and despotism achieves a powerful impact after a thousand-year delay: since the early modern period, the *libertas Germaniae* has been understood as an 'old' ancestral liberty and equated with contemporary efforts towards greater freedom which were aimed against monarchic central power and foreign interference driven in particular by the estates of the realm. In this context, the image of the Germanic peoples, partly derived from Tacitus, is conflated with the ideology of Gothicism which itself implies an idea of the North as the origin of liberty-loving peoples. It assumes that a long time ago the Goths left their original homelands in Scandinavia in order to subjugate large parts of the known world and to disseminate their indigenous culture with all its liberal institutions. This idea is based on a remark by the late antique historian Jordanes (†552). He connects the Goths' place of origin with a place called *Scandza insula* and identifies this region as the fount of all peoples, an 'officina gentium' or a 'vagina nationum', as in his much-quoted phrases from *De origine actibusque Getarum* (IV, 25). These phrases feed the widespread modern notion that the fall of the Roman Empire was due to a massive migration movement, the so-called Barbarian migrations or *Völkerwanderung*. The close interdependency of the reception of Tacitus and Gothicism results in a mutual overlay of the ethnonyms 'Goths' and 'Germans' as interchangeable generic terms for the multitude of early medieval tribes which were regarded as having built modern liberal Europe on the ruins of the Roman Empire. The ethnographical 'fuzziness' evident in this view is typical of the time and remains in force for a long time: Celts, Scythians, Sarmatians, Germans and Danes are among the peoples identified with these tribes. In the perception of the eighteenth century they all coalesce into a large group of Nordic peoples associated with a common culture (see Chapter 7.1 for the impact of these ideas in the developing field of linguistics).

The recourse to early medieval barbarians as an identity-giving construct takes on 'national' characteristics long before the time of nation building. In Sweden, early modern 'Göticism' was intended to legitimize the imperial power politics of the Swedish kings by equating the Swedes with the Goths and thus validating them as an ancient civilized people (Schmidt-Voges 2004; see also Chapters 3.1 and 5.3 in this volume). In Germany, however, Tacitus and his *Germania* gain a level of importance that is difficult to overestimate during the period of Humanism, when the contrast of Germanic peoples and

Romans seems to repeat itself in the conflict with the Curia and to threaten ancestral 'German liberty' (Krebs 2011: 81–104). In England, a synthesis of Gothicist and Tacitean elements is exemplified by the idea of Anglo-Saxon or Gothic liberty, which is a cornerstone of the ideology of the parliamentary system and forms part of a defence of the right of the estates to participate in the rule of the country (Kidd 1999). In France, the nobility had demanded participation in the rule of the country since the seventeenth century, referring to its descent from the Franks with their liberal constitution (Beck 1934; Briggs 2000). Many other examples could be found (e.g., Schmidt 2006).

These early modern ideologies of liberty which invoked the 'Germanic' name also touch on problems of religion, especially of religious politics. They are particularly frequently connected with orthodox Protestant views, but the pre-Christian faith cannot be used as a point of reference for as long as Christianity's claim to universal validity remains inviolable. The pre-Christian religions only come into focus more clearly during the Enlightenment with its new way of understanding religions (see Chapter 4.1).

The Pre-Christian Religion of the Northern Peoples as an Expression of their Liberal Disposition

The hypothesis that a people's love of liberty is connected to its religion fits systematically into Montesquieu's anti-absolutist theory of the state, particularly in his work on the spirit of the laws mentioned above. Here, Montesquieu condemns despotism and argues for the necessity of the separation of powers and the limitation of governmental power by laws. His argument takes up the *topoi* discussed above — the climatological thought of Aristotle, Tacitus's *libertas Germaniae*, Jordanes's 'forge of peoples', the idea that the fall of Rome was caused by great migrations of liberty-loving barbarians — but puts them into new contexts influenced by the political ideas of the Enlightenment. Germanic liberty now not only refers to the 'ancient' liberties of the Germanic tribes but to a liberty which is common to all peoples of the North and which is the liberty of a primitive people. As such it does not remain limited to the natural state in the sense of an early phase in the historical development of the Northern peoples. Rather, Montesquieu generalizes their love of liberty in connection with his ideas about the individual characteristics of different peoples and declares it to be a distinguishing feature of a people's character (*esprit général*). According to this view, if a people tends towards a liberal disposition due to its natural living conditions — as is the case with the inhabitants of the European North according to climate theory — it will manage from the outset

with more lenient laws and a smaller amount of disciplinary force on the part of the state. Montesquieu ascribes the same effect to religion: a characteristic aspect of liberal peoples is a religion whose ideas of the afterlife lead to defiance of death in the here and now. Defiance of death obviates the need for legislation in a similar way to the climate (bk XXIV, ch. 14).

In 1755–56, Paul Henri Mallet claimed to confirm this hypothesis based on the pre-Christian religion of the North and in particular the Old Norse tradition. He discusses this in the French-language 'History of the Danish Empire' with which he endeavours, in the context of a political debate that had been going on since the seventeenth century, to disprove the accusation that Denmark, with its absolutistic constitution, is an example of a modern despotic state (see Haakonssen and Horstbøll 2008 and in particular Kidd 2008).[1] In the first volume, Mallet goes back far into antiquity and shows more interest in *l'ancienne religion du Nord* ('the ancient religion of the North'; Mallet 1755: 45–98) than anybody before him. He takes the necessary information from the writings of the so-called Scandinavian Renaissance of the seventeenth century which already showed a distinct interest in the heroic death-defiance of the ancient Scandinavians (see Chapter 3.1). In 1689, the Danish scholar Thomas Bartholin (1659–90) devotes a whole book to the topic (*Antiquitatum Danicarum [...] libri tres*) which was demonstrably also known to Montesquieu (1748, bk XXIV, ch. 19). Here one encounters again the aforementioned 'ethnographic fuzziness' of the time in the term 'ancient Danes', which for the most part encompasses all inhabitants of the North before Christianization. This explains the way Bartholin is able to find evidence of the ancient Danes' death-defying mentality in Icelandic texts, namely, in eddic and skaldic poetry with their references to belief in Valhalla. He particularly likes to quote texts and passages of text which make the ancient Danes appear especially martial, a reflection of the many violent disputes fought between Denmark and Sweden in the seventeenth century (Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1987: 298–99). Already in the first chapter he is looking for instances that show that because of the promise of Valhalla, the ancient Danes did not fear death and died laughing, as allegedly evidenced by *Krákumál*, the death song of the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók (Bartholin 1689: 4).

All of these ideas can be found in Mallet's work (e.g., 1755: 134–38). He consistently interprets them according to Montesquieu's idea of liberty and fur-

[1] For more detail, see Chapter 4.5 below. Mallet's assessment of religion is also discussed more extensively there, so that only the most important points will be mentioned here.

thermore follows Montesquieu in the view that religion in particular allows conclusions to be drawn about a people's character and its past cultural circumstances. Mallet picks out religion as a central theme because he hopes for particular insight into Norse antiquity. For him, its reconstruction becomes a suggestive depiction of an ancient culture and religion which he assumes to be common to all Northern peoples and to be still accessible in the form of the Edda's *Mythologie celtique*.[2] According to Mallet, even this early culture is the result of a kind of liberty movement. He interprets the migration of the Æsir, led by Odin, from their native Asia to the North, which is reported by medieval Icelandic historiography, in this fashion. This interpretation turns Odin into a historical liberator figure — an idea that is discussed extensively in the eighteenth century, particularly in England and France (see Beck 1935; Rix 2010) — who positively embodies the liberal culture of the North in contrast to classical antiquity.

Mallet's framework is clearly based on the dichotomous model of criticizing the present which had been developed from climate theory in antiquity. As with Montesquieu, the liberal North appears not only as a precursor of modern Europe and a counterpoint to absolutism, which was identified with Roman despotism; for Mallet it also stands for the aesthetics of his own time, which tries to overcome the normative poetics of classicism. He sees the new aesthetic concept of the sublime (which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.3) as being embodied in the Norse myths — after he separated them from religion in an enlightened-rationalist manner, classifies them as 'fables' belonging to the category of poetry and makes them available to his readers separately from his description of religion. The impact on the reader of Mallet's critical engagement with myths in the vein of the Enlightenment is twofold: on the one hand, it rehabilitates myth as a type of poetry and opens up a new way of discussing it. Thus, from the end of the eighteenth century the Norse myths can be considered separately from religion in aesthetic and political contexts, at first particularly in scholarship and literature, later also in the visual arts and beyond. On the other hand, the Enlightenment's way of understanding myth also provokes attempts to recombine myth and religion in a new polytheism (Gladigow 2002: 16–18).

[2] Mallet refers to the version of *Snorra Edda* published by Resen in 1665 as well as to a number of Old Norse poems which Mallet himself published in French translation in a supplement to his *Histoire de Dannemarc* in 1756. Mallet's use of the term 'Celtic' and other details are discussed more extensively in Chapter 4.5.

Norse Myths in Political Communication

In many instances since the end of the eighteenth century, political allegories portray Norse gods as carrying the flag of liberty. An early example is provided by the British poet Robert Southey (1774–1843) with his poem *The Race of Odin* (1795), which maps the contrast between the freedom fighter Odin and the Romans onto the violent conflicts which followed the French Revolution (Mortensen 2000: 226–30). Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which served to put the political *topos* of liberty back on the agenda and to revive the early modern ideologies of liberty as demands for civil emancipation (see, e.g., for the 'German liberty' Weiland 1986), one can see a nationalistically determined political utilization of Eddic materials, particularly in Scandinavia and German-speaking regions. Motifs from Norse mythology are used especially frequently in Denmark to emphasize emancipatory intentions. The mythological *Sindbilledsprog* ('allegorical language') of N. S. F. Grundtvig (1783–1872) (see Chapter 8.1 in this volume and, in particular, Chapter 1 in Volume II) sets the tone for this. It intended to maintain a common Scandinavian identity and a popular Danish national culture (*danskhed*, 'Danishness') against the cultural and political dominance of the 'Other'. In the milieu of the Danish so-called *folkehøjskoler*, which develop in the nineteenth century as educational institutions above all for the rural population, following an idea of Grundtvig's, this interpretation of myths continues to be influential for a long time, for instance, when the Danish farmers make use of mythological allegories and Grundtvig's motto *Frihed for Loke såvel som for Thor* ('Freedom for Loki as well as for Thor') in their fight for liberty and democracy (Lönnroth 1979, 1988). Traces of Grundtvig's politics of myth can be found up until the time of the Danish Marxist student movement, which utilizes the wolf Fenrir as a symbol of its criticism of capitalism and which aims to give the cultural revolution everlasting validity by employing imagery associated with Ragnarök (Lönnroth 1979: 50–54). Grundtvig already hints at something that can also be observed in Sweden in the second half of the nineteenth century: recourse to Norse mythology is now also used to evoke individual rights of liberty alongside collective ones. One of these is freedom of opinion, which is, for example, defended with revolutionary fury by August Strindberg in a satirical reinterpretation of the eddic poem *Lokasenna* (*Lokes Smädelser*, 'Loki's Taunts' (1883); see Schulz 2009). In Germany, Norse gods and myths generally play a more minor role in political communication. Attempts to connect these matters to liberal endeavours — a well-known example of this is Ludwig Uhland's 'democratic' interpretation of the god Thor in 1836, which still finds echoes in

the Communist Party of Germany's program in 1918 — soon became overlaid by anti-emancipatory and imperialistic interpretations (see Zernack 2016).

Polytheism and Monotheism

While from Mallet onwards allusions to Old Norse myth and poetry connote an inborn collective liberty for the peoples of the North, the revaluation of the pagan belief in the Æsir as a religion is connected to a different kind of desire for liberty. It is part of a long tradition of invoking polytheism in contrast to monotheism in a claim for pluralism and tolerance, mostly through reference to the classical pantheon (Losehand 2009; Gladigow 1998, 2002).

The first signs that Germanic paganism was no longer viewed solely in a negative light can be discerned among German Protestant scholars at the turn of the eighteenth century. The ancient religion appears to them as a backwards projection of Protestantism into pre-Christian times: an indigenous form of belief that stands in opposition to Roman popery. They regard Christianization as the introduction of a new Roman foreign rule, in whose wake indigenous religion and culture were pushed aside by Christianity (Böldl 2000: 42–68). How easy it was to connect this idea to the *topos* of the ancestral liberty of the Germanic peoples can be seen in the German *Vormärz*, when interest in indigenous paganism is renewed based on resistance against political restoration and a search for a national identity (Weiland 1986: 233–37). A prominent example of this development is Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) with its positive assessment of pagan religion: *vielgötterei ist duldsam und freundlich: wer nur himmel oder hölle, gott oder teufel im auge hat, pflegt überschwänklich* [sic] *zu lieben und hart zu hassen* ('polytheism is tolerant and friendly: he who only has eyes for heaven or hell, God or the devil, is wont to love excessively and hate fiercely') (Grimm 1992: I, xxxix–xl). Far from advocating a neopagan veneration of the ancient Germanic peoples, Grimm views Germanic paganism as a precondition for the Reformation. In his view, the Reformation overcame the negative aspects of paganism, detached itself from Roman Catholicism and thus made the native faith *freier* ('more liberal'; ibid: 5). This link between the alleged Germanic liberty and the Reformation is typical of its time and reflects a widespread need to harmonize the invocation of Germanic traditions and Christianity, which also shows itself in different form in the works of the Danish bishop Grundtvig. This is in contrast to the decidedly religious, neopagan turn towards Germanic polytheism which spreads through German-speaking areas at the end of the nineteenth century and gains a certain international degree of importance in the last third of the twentieth century (see most recently von Schnurbein 2016).

Its followers understand it as an emancipatory act: as the rebellion of a natural religion in the tradition of Friedrich Nietzsche's tolerant polytheism against the hegemony of the monotheistic religions of the book. In reality, this rebellion in many cases exhibits anti-liberal traits, in particular because of pronounced anti-rationalist, anti-Christian (anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic and often anti-Islamic) grievances which imply affinity to racist ideologies.

Conclusion

The idea of collective liberty associated with the North or the Germanic peoples respectively most likely gains its impact from the simplified anachronistic schematization which has recourse to the past to criticize present conditions. Religion and mythology only influence the development of this long-lived stereotype at a late stage, when the death-defiance of the Northern peoples — based on their belief in Valhalla — is discovered as a factor which significantly contributes to the Germanic or Northern peoples' love of liberty, which by this point has long been considered self-evident. Subsequently, reconstruction of this ancient religion is meant to provide a direct impression of the liberal culture of the early peoples of the North. Since Norse religion and mythology only become known within this context, they are regarded from the outset as representing a kind of counter-culture. Thus, they are referred to not only by advocates of political liberalism but by any movement that claims 'emancipation'. Its stereotypical structure turns the term 'liberty' into something so non-specific and malleable that in the end it becomes possible for Norse religion and mythology to be invoked in the name of liberty even by anti-liberal factions.

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4.3 – The New Aesthetics and the Concept of the Sublime

Margaret Clunies Ross

Alongside their valuation of the quality of human reason, well-bred people of the Enlightenment valued the human senses and human powers of perception, and, in particular, the ability to appreciate the beauty of the harmonious combination of natural and man-made environments in both the real world and in literature and the arts. The identification of what gave people aesthetic pleasure and the social endorsement of that pleasure among the elites of European society contributed to their self-identification and sense of self-worth. The ability to identify what was aesthetically pleasing in nature, landscape and the arts was often referred to as 'taste',[1] to which the epithet 'good' was frequently affixed.

In the first part of the Enlightenment period, aesthetic pleasure was associated in most areas of human culture with classical standards and classical forms,

[1] See *OED* (accessed 16 February 2016), s.v. *taste*, n.[1], sense 8: 'The sense of what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful; *esp*. discernment and appreciation of the beautiful in nature or art; *spec*. the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like.'

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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as people then understood them. Order and regularity of form were prized; poets frequently composed in heroic couplets and dramatic works were often based on the three classical 'unities' of time, place and action. Classical literature and classical art, based on eighteenth-century understandings of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, were the standards that people admired. Yet, even though classical authors were the fundamental subjects of the educated man's school and university curriculum, there were numerous aspects of the world the classical texts depicted that did not accord with eighteenth-century notions of taste. The world depicted in the epics of Homer, for example, could only be tolerated by recognizing that these epics convey a pleasure 'which we receive from a representation of natural and simple manners: it is irresistible and enchanting; they best show human wants and feelings; they give us back the emotions of an artless mind' (Blackwell 1735, in Ashfield and de Bolla 1996: 164). Thomas Blackwell, a Scottish classicist and historian of religion, was later (1748: 408) to describe early humans' religious beliefs in similar terms, referring to the Old Norse myth of the creation of the first humans, Askr and Embla.

Blackwell's comments reveal the thinking of many towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Older societies untouched by the refinements of modern tastes could be admired for qualities of naturalness, simplicity and sincerity, which excused rough manners and barbaric depictions of human behaviour and other phenomena, including ancient myths. Very soon a further ingredient was added to this means of both excusing and admiring pre-modern societies: the concept of the primitive poet or bard, who possessed *par excellence* 'the power of a warm imagination to suggest lively images' (Blair 1763 in Gaskill 1996: 345–46). Upon this intellectual milieu, and primed to take Europe by storm, burst the publication of the supposedly ancient and primitive poetry of the early Scots bard Ossian, as first presented in the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) published by James Macpherson.

The Ossian publications, together with many other publications of 'primitive' literature, coincided with the development of a new aesthetic of what was pleasurable, an aesthetic that located the source of pleasure not in order and regularity of form and content, but in noble ideas found in the grandiose, the irregular, the grotesque and the bizarre or shocking. This concept was expressed as 'the sublime'. The Irish philosopher Edmund Burke (1757: 13) defined it as 'whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.' Burke went on to contrast the sublime with the beautiful:

> sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. (1757: 115)

Poets, artists and scholars in the second half of the eighteenth century were strongly influenced by the aesthetic of the sublime both in their own compositions and in their interpretations (which often took the form of translations or 'versions' of older poetry) of the pre-Christian myths and literatures of early European societies. Increasingly also, these interpretations were coloured by nationalism, especially in Scandinavia but also in Germany and Britain; the creators of these works were 'our' ancestors, however 'our' was defined.

The concept of the sublime allowed those who promoted the products of early European culture to get around a number of criticisms from those who did not believe in the sublime and regarded early literatures and cultures as tasteless and barbarous. For most eighteenth-century people, even scholars, early medieval texts, which were the earliest and usually the only witnesses available to them of 'primitive' European cultures, were all considered to be pagan. There was no conception that some of them were the product of early medieval Christian piety, nor that most were written down by Christians after the conversion of these early societies to Christianity. The recognition that almost all our witnesses to the pre-Christian myths and religions of Europe, including those of Scandinavia, were the product of a Christian society was very slow in coming and is still not recognized by many people today. Furthermore, there was a tendency from the eighteenth century right up into the twentieth for scholars to denigrate those early vernacular texts that were clearly Christian as mere 'religious rhapsodies' (Warton 1774–81: I, vi).

During the second half of the eighteenth century and into the first decades of the nineteenth, there was an on-going debate about the merits of literature and art that depended for their subject matter and stylistic expression on the early mythologies and religions of pre-Christian Europe rather than those of the classical world. In connection with the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia, this debate was particularly acute in Denmark and Sweden in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as Part 6 below makes clear, but to some extent it underlay all serious attempts to substitute the unfamiliar Norse mythology for that of the classical world. In spite of the supposedly sublime merits of the Norse poetic texts that were becoming available, to some extent in their original language, but mostly in modern European language translations,

both the subject matter and the style of these works were strange and unfamiliar. Few people, except for a small handful of scholars, understood anything about the concepts behind such works, nor did they have any clear idea of the whole mythological world-picture that lay behind them. In this period also, the number of texts with mythological content available to the general European public was highly restricted, so the same stereotyped images were presented to the reading and viewing public again and again. And in a number of instances the stereotypes were based on misconceptions to be found in early modern treatises and passed on through a number of later translators and popularizers.

The most celebrated case of this type concerns the reception of the Old Norse poem *Krákumál* ('Speeches of the Crow') and the distorted idea of Norse warrior ideology and the conception of Valhalla, the warrior 'heaven', that derived from several mistranslations that appeared both in Ole Worm's first printed edition of the poem (1636) and in most subsequent translations during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The heroic warrior, Ragnarr loðbrók ('Hairy-Breeches'), who is the speaker of the poem, here appears to endorse the pleasures of fighting one enemy after another as just as delightful as bedding, kissing or being served wine by a woman, rather than as contrasting these kinds of activities, which is how the poem actually presents them. Another egregious misunderstanding in the same poem was that Norse heroes in Valhalla drank ale out of their victims' skulls. This was based on a mistranslation of a kenning for a drinking horn in the poetic text.[2] Such misconceptions were willingly entertained by people whose only general understanding of Old Norse religion derived at second or third hand from a treatise such as Thomas Bartholin's (1689), which characterized the ancient Scandinavians as heroes of incomparable bravery who were more stoical in their suffering of pain than the Greeks and Romans.

[2] For further information on how these misunderstandings came about, see Rory McTurk's introduction to his edition of the poem (Anon *Krm*) in SkP VIII: II, 707–77.

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4.4 – Dalin, Ramsay and the Enlightened Reaction to Rudbeckianism

Lars Lönnroth

Although Olaus Rudbeck's fantastic ideas (described in Chapter 3.1 above) had been accepted with enthusiasm by many prominent authorities in Sweden and even by a few learned scholars in other countries, they had also met with considerable resistance from the very beginning. One of his earliest and most severe critics was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the German philosopher, who rejected the basic premises of Rudbeck's grandiose theories in a dissertation entitled *De origine Germanorum* ('Concerning the Origin of the Germans') (1697). Leibniz's criticism had a strong influence on one of Rudbeck's Swedish colleagues, Erik Benzelius Jr, who became a prominent philologist, the head librarian at Uppsala University and eventually the archbishop of Sweden. He as well as other scholars in Uppsala prevented Rudbeckianism from being fully established as official dogma even in Sweden. In fact, its basic ideas often met with scepticism or even ridicule among academic experts.

Nevertheless, Rudbeck's theories were ardently believed and further developed by his students and admirers in Sweden for many years after his death in 1702. It would take almost half a century before Rudbeckianism completely died out, since its learned followers, such as Johannes Göransson and Eric Julius Biörner, were protected by one of the highest ranking and most influential Swedish aristocrats, Gustaf Bonde. What finally put an end to this school

Lars Lönnroth is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, University of Gothenburg. His fields of expertise include Old Norse and Swedish Literature. Publications include *Njáls saga: A Critical Introduction* (1976), *Skaldemjödet i berget* (1995) and *The Academy of Odin* (2011).

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of thought was not so much the scholarly arguments presented by academic experts but rather the fashionable breakthrough of the Enlightenment as an intellectual and literary movement among the upper classes of Europe. This new movement did not encourage the pompously learned, speculative and opaque way of writing history that was common among Rudbeck's followers but favoured a more elegant, clear and witty presentation in the vernacular, represented by brilliant secular writers such as Voltaire in France, David Hume in England, Ludvig Holberg in Denmark and Olof Dalin in Sweden.

Among these enlightened and, for a long time, fashionable writers the poet and historian Olof Dalin (1708–63) was the only one who concerned himself explicitly and at length with Rudbeck's ideas and with eddic mythology in a way that not only made a laughing stock of Rudbeckianism but also radically changed prevailing opinions about Old Norse religion. Dalin did this primarily in the first volume of his monumental *Svea Rikes Historia* ('History of the Nation of Sweden') (1747–61), which had a profound influence on later writers in Scandinavia and Germany. It should be mentioned, however, that Dalin had an important forerunner in his eminent and much admired colleague Ludvig Holberg's *Dannemarks riges Historie* ('History of the Nation of Denmark') (1732–35). Holberg had not deigned to engage in polemics with Rudbeck or his followers, and he only gave a summary account of Old Norse religion, but his sober way of dealing with early Scandinavian history was similar to Dalin's, and he referred ironically but only in passing to what he called the 'sects' of earlier Scandinavian antiquarians, Danish as well as Swedish. In Holberg's opinion, it was useless to discuss at length the opinions of these 'sects', since doing so would be 'like producing lengthy dissertations about the qualities of the Phoenix before one knows whether such a bird really exists' (1856: I, 31).

Dalin, however, had more of a taste for polemics than Holberg. His earliest and most popular attack on Rudbeckianism took the form of a satirical parody of a learned treatise, *Wisdoms-prof eller Herr Arngrim Berserks förträffeliga tankar öfwer et fynd i jorden* ('Test of Wisdom or Herr Arngrim Berserk's Excellent Thoughts about a Discovery in the Earth') (1739). In this text, a somewhat deranged and angry scholar, Arngrim Berserk, whose name and pompous language show that he is meant to be a caricature of Biörner, describes an apparently trivial round vessel (possibly a discarded chamber pot) which he has found buried in the ground. After lengthy obscure speculations and learned references to various Old Norse legends of dubious origin, Arngrim Berserk concludes that the vessel must be the ancient helmet of a great Gothic hero.

Biörner reacted to this persiflage with tremendous indignation in several writings of his own. He even tried to sue Dalin for slander, but to no avail, for

Dalin was by this time a popular author, highly esteemed at the Swedish court, where he entertained the king and queen with witty poems, songs and dramatic performances. In his *Svea Rikes Historia*, however, he also managed to convince his admirers that he was a competent historian with a good knowledge of Old Norse sources and of recent developments within the natural sciences. Thus he dismissed the Rudbeckian version of Sweden's earliest history not only with the help of Snorri's *Heimskringla* and other Icelandic texts but also by referring to contemporary scientific theories, according to which Sweden had been almost entirely covered by water at the very time when the nation, according to Rudbeck, had been at the height of its power and glory, admired by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Dalin's most influential achievement as a historian, however, was his interpretation of Old Norse mythology as a somewhat distorted version of God's original revelation. This interpretation was partly based on the *Prologue* to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* but more specifically on the religious theories of a Scottish philosopher and novelist by the name of Andrew Ramsay (1686–1743) (Mandelbrote 2004), who lived in Paris and published his works in French. Dalin had met this author in Paris when he visited the French capital in 1739 (Warburg 1884: 270–71) and had been strongly impressed with the ideas expressed in Ramsay's novel *Les Voyages de Cyrus* ('The Travels of Cyrus'), published in Paris in 1727.

Les Voyages de Cyrus is an 'educational novel' of the kind introduced by Fénelon in his nowadays forgotten piece of fiction, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), which was, however, immensely popular in the eighteenth century. The basic idea of such educational novels is to teach young people the right way to truth and good customs by describing the upbringing and experience of some famous young prince, in Fénelon's case the son of Ulysses, Telemachus, in Ramsay's case the great Persian ruler, Cyrus, whose education had previously been described by Xenophon in his classic work *Kyropaidia* (early fourth century BC). What distinguishes Ramsay's *Les Voyages de Cyrus* from both *Les Aventures de Télémaque* and *Kyropaidia*, however, is its interest in comparative religion and mythology. The hero of the novel, Cyrus, is shown travelling from country to country of early antiquity and meeting with representatives of their various religions, whose advantages and disadvantages he is then able to compare. In the end Cyrus concludes that all religions contain an element of truth and should thus be respected, even though the religion of the Hebrews — which anticipates the great religion of the future, Christianity — should be regarded as the best available faith. By reaching this conclusion Cyrus becomes a wise and tolerant ruler of Persia.

This deistic and ecumenical view of the ancient religions was further developed in Ramsay's theoretical appendix, *Discours sur la mythologie* ('Discourse on Mythology'), which is partly dependent on the ideas of Fénelon but also on a much earlier theological work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), by the English Platonist Ralph Cudworth. In his *Discours*, Ramsay attempts to show that even though the poets of antiquity have celebrated many different gods, the 'philosophers' of all cultures have been conscious of the fact that there is really only one true god, whose essence consists of the three basic properties of Power (*puissance*), Wisdom (*intelligence*) and Love (*amour*). This trinity is, according to Ramsay, sacred in several ancient pagan religions, and Ramsay therefore suggests that they may all, at least to some extent, anticipate Christianity. He argues, furthermore, that most ancient religions presuppose the existence of a Divine Mediator (*Dieu mitoyen*), corresponding to Christ, who lovingly intervenes in the eternal struggle between Good and Evil: thus Mithras in Persia, Horus in Egypt and various other pagan gods should be understood as such mediators. Such similarities between the various mythologies of the world indicate, according to Ramsay, that they are all rooted in the same original Divine Revelation, although they have not all preserved it as well as the Jews and the Christians have.

In accordance with Ramsay's *Discours*, Dalin presented the Old Norse religion as follows in *Svea Rikes Historia:*

> Sveriges äldste Invånares Guda-lära har gådt äfven så högt i lius och sanning som de gamle Egyptiers, Chaldéers och Persers, fast hon ej warit utprålad med så mycken wältalighet. Jag talar ej om den Poetiska, som ej bestod af annat än dikt; ty Skalderne giorde Gudomligheter efter behag af alt det de sågo i Naturen och den enfaldiga werlden trodde dem på orden [...]. Jag menar allenast den Lära, som deras *Drottar* eller Philosopher förkunnade, hvilken altid så wäl hos oss, som hos Græker och Romare, bör skiljas från den Poëtiska. (1747–61: I, 116–17)

> (The pantheon of Sweden's oldest inhabitants has reached as high a level of enlightenment and truth as that of the ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans and Persians, even though it has not been adorned with as much eloquence. I do not speak of the poetic mythology, which consisted of nothing but fiction; for the poets made Deities after their own desire and the stupid world believed their words [...]. I am referring only to that doctrine which was taught by their *Drottar* or philosophers and which should always, in our case as well as that of the Greeks and the Romans, be separated from that of the poets.)

The distinction which Dalin makes here between the pantheon of poets and the pantheon of philosophers is obviously derived from Ramsay's *Discours* —

to which he also refers in a marginal note — and the same thing may be said about his reference to 'Egyptians' and 'Chaldeans'. It is much less obvious what Dalin means by '*Drottar* eller Philosopher', since no such category of religious thinkers is known from Old Norse sources. He may be thinking, however, of learned men such as Snorri Sturluson or of noble heathens like the ones mentioned in the Prologue of the *Prose Edda* as archaic believers in some unknown *stjórnari himintunglanna* ('controller of the heavenly bodies'). At any rate it appears likely that Dalin found a confirmation of Ramsay's theories in Snorri's Prologue, where he speaks about the original faith of the heathens and its later development into various pagan religions. In fact there are close similarities between Snorri's thinking about pagan mythology and Ramsay's, a fact which makes it easy to understand why Dalin decided to combine the two. He continues his own presentation of Old Swedish religion — in its early and 'philosophical' form — as follows:

> Denna [lära] hade sin upprinnelse af Noachs och Stamfädernes rena kundskap om Gud; men med tiden, antingen af wårdslöshet eller menniskiors tilsatser, wansläktade hon liksom andra från sin första menlöshet; hon underhölls dock temmeligen deruti hos de äldste Scandianer af den urgamla och stora Sedo-lära, som kallades *Volu-Spa* eller den första *Edda* [...]. Denna Lära utspäddes och bortskiämdes mycket så wäl af Odens och Asarnes som derefter af Skaldernas Dikter, så at hon blef sig grufveligen olik: dock kan ännu ganska mycket godt hämtas af det lilla, som ej blifvit förloradt. (1747–61: I, 117–18)

> (This [creed] was based on the pure knowledge of God possessed by Noah and the tribal ancestors; but eventually it was, like the other [creeds], corrupted from its first innocence, either because of carelessness or because of human additions to it; yet it was reasonably well kept up among the oldest Scandinavians by the ancient and great ethical doctrine called *Volu-Spa* or the first *Edda* [...]. This doctrine was diluted and corrupted first by Odin and the Æsir and later by the poetry of the skalds, so that it changed miserably: yet much good can still be derived from the small portion that did not get lost.)

This description of the religious development among the early Scandinavians is in good accordance with Snorri and also with Ramsay, since both of them maintain that the original revelation was corrupted at a later stage among the pagans. According to Snorri's *Edda*, the most important corruption took place when Odin made King Gylfi and his Swedes believe that the Æsir were gods and should be worshipped as such. Both Snorri and Dalin see the skalds as Odin's direct followers and hence as principal transmitters of pagan myths and delusions. It should be noted, however, that Dalin does not see *Vǫluspá* and

other mythical lays of the Edda as poetic creations of the skalds but as parts of an ancient philosophical *Sedo-Lära*, or ethical doctrine, in which God's divine revelation has been better preserved than in skaldic poetry. This view is further elaborated in one of Dalin's long footnotes, in which he describes the oldest Edda as an extremely archaic and valuable collection of religious texts from the pagan era, later in part destroyed by Christian monks but again collected and partly restored around 1114 by Sæmundr Sigfússon and then again around 1215 by Snorri Sturluson, who is credited with the noble deed of having saved the last remaining fragments of the Edda before it was completely lost to posterity. Although Dalin's way of referring to the destructive activities of Christian monks is influenced by the anticlerical spirit of the Enlightenment, his views about the preservation of the Edda are mainly derived from earlier antiquarians such as Brynjólfur Sveinsson, who regarded both *Sæmundar Edda* and *Snorra Edda* as late redactions of a much older mythological work from prehistoric times.

Dalin then proceeds to describe the original monotheism of the early Swedes and their belief in a Trinity similar to that of Christianity:

> En enda Alsmäktig Gud tilbad wår äldsta Svenska werld under namn af Oden och tillade honom sådana namn och egenskaper, at de hos oss må upwäcka förundran: Han kallades *Altings Fader* och *Begynnare*, den *Alrahögste*, den *Evige* [...]. Liksom de gamle Chaldéer och Egyptier begripit alla Guds egenskaper under *Makt, Kärlek* och *Wishet*, hvarföre ock Tre-talet warit i så stor wördnad hos de äldste Philosopher; så hafva äfven de gamle Svenske inneslutit Gudomligheten under tre på Kungelige troner sittande personer, *Har, Jafn-Har* och *Tridi*, det är, den *Store*, den *Lika-Store* och den *Tredie*, hvarmed de förstådt samma Gudomeliga egenskaper *Makt, Kärlek* och *Wishet*. (1747–61: I, 119–23)

> (Our oldest Swedish community worshipped one almighty God under the name of Odin and gave him such names and attributed to him such properties that they should make us amazed: He was called *Father of All* and *Beginner*, the *Highest of All*, the *Eternal* [...]. In the same manner as the old Chaldeans and Egyptians understood all God's properties as functions of *Power*, *Love* and *Wisdom*, thus making the number three greatly venerated among the oldest philosophers, so the old Swedes subsumed under the Godhead three persons sitting on royal thrones, *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr* and *Þriðji*, i.e., the Great, the Just-as-Great and the Third, by which they referred to those same Divine properties *Power*, *Love* and *Wisdom*.

The trinity of *Hárr*, *Jafn-Hárr* and *Þriðji* that confronts King Gylfi in *Gylfaginning* is thus interpreted according to Ramsay's theory. Further on, however, Dalin explains that Odin represents Power, Thor Love and Frigga Wisdom

(1747: I, 140). The various *heiti* for Odin listed by Snorri in *Gylfaginning* are interpreted as referring to the properties of the Almighty God of Christianity. Thor is characterized as the *Medel-Gud* ('middle god') of the Scandinavians just as Horus, according to Ramsay, is the middle god of the Egyptians, Mithras of the Persians, Adonis of the Syrians, and so forth. The Norse Thunderer is described by Dalin as a 'son or designated hero of the Almighty, the one mentioned by all ancient poets as the one who should come to the world in order to reconcile Good and Evil, strike down everything that is harmful and raise the downtrodden' (1747–61: I, 124–25). Thor is thus, in spite of his belligerent character and brutal treatment of the giants, an example of Ramsay's Christ-like *Dieu mitoyen*. It is his task to bring back the innocent and happy Golden Age (*Gylldene Ålder*) which preceded the Fall. He reigns in 'Bil-Skermer' (i.e., Old Norse *Bilskirnir*), which Dalin interprets as meaning 'Protector of Innocence' and 'Shield of the Unhappy' (1747–61: I, 132). His enemy is the Midgard Serpent, who, according to Dalin, is the symbol of Sin, finally defeated at Ragnarök or Judgement Day (1747–61: I, 134–35).

Frigga is, correspondingly, said to be originally related to various other similar pagan goddesses such as Pallas of Greece and Isis of Egypt, but she is also claimed to be the same as 'Urania or the Queen of Heaven'. She is also said to be worshipped under the name of Astarte or Astarot — names which in Dalin's opinion are related to Old Norse *Ástar-goð* or 'god of love'. She is, furthermore, described as the equivalent of the Finnish Jumala and the Ephesian Diana, who in the New Testament (Acts 19.26) is said to be worshipped 'in Asia and the whole world' (1747–61: I, 139).

Quoting *Vǫluspá* and the *Prose Edda*, Dalin also tries to show that the early Swedes originally believed in the immortality of the soul and an afterlife in either Heaven or Hell. But this knowledge of the eternal truth is maintained to have been corrupted, in much the same way as in Palestine, when the original monotheism was replaced in the North by the polytheism encouraged by skalds and pagan priests (1747–61: I, 157–60). The main responsibility for this deterioration Dalin attributes to the immigrant from Asia who called himself Odin, even though his real name was Sigge Fridulfson. Through the deceptions and poetic art of this man, the old religion of Sweden is supposed to have been transformed almost beyond recognition, even though it continued to preserve some fragments of the original truth (1747–61: I,157–96).

Such then, in broad outline, is Dalin's view of Old Norse mythology — a view that seemed modern and reasonable enough in its time, even though it does not fit the facts as we now know them very well. Dalin had presented his and Ramsay's opinions in an attractive way that was easy to understand,

and they were soon echoed by other scholars as well as by laymen. The first volume of *Svea Rikes Historia* was translated into German as *Geschichte des Reiches Schweden* (Greifswald, 1756) and evidently read by quite a few people outside Sweden. The most influential of his immediate followers was probably Paul Henri Mallet, the Swiss intellectual who for a while was a professor at the University of Copenhagen and later became the international prophet of the 'Nordic Renaissance' in Europe (see Section 4.5 below). In the preface of his *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) Mallet enthusiastically praised Dalin's *Svea Rikes Historia*, which he read in Swedish, especially its chapters on the religion, laws and customs of the early Swedes. And it is indeed obvious that Mallet was influenced by Dalin's and Ramsay's method of dealing with the pagan myths: like them, he stresses the importance of separating the religion of philosophers from the mythology of poets; like them, he maintains that the earliest pagans were monotheists who believed in a divine trinity; like Dalin, he presents the god Thor as a mediating, Christ-like figure, *une divinité mitoyenne, un médiateur entre dieu et les hommes* ('a Mediator divinity, a mediator between god and men'), with close parallels in Asian and Near-Eastern mythologies.

From Mallet and Dalin these thoughts were passed on to people like Thomas Percy in England and Johann Gottfried Herder in Germany, and further on to early Romantic poets in Scandinavia and Germany, who eagerly accepted the idea that Old Norse mythology is not just a barbaric superstition but essentially a Scandinavian or Germanic variety of a universal religion ultimately based on divine revelation and hence a sublime reflection of Absolute Truth. This made it possible for poets in the nineteenth century to use the Norse myths as symbols of Christian and Romantic metaphysics, and this was in fact what many of them did.

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4.5 – A Key Work for the Reception History of Norse Mythology and Poetry: Paul Henri Mallet's *History of the Danish Empire* and its European Impact

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

In seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe only a few specialists were familiar with the pre-Christian religion and mythology of the North. Knowledge of this tradition became more widespread in the 1750s and 60s and in the period of transition from late Enlightenment to early Romanticism. This (slightly misleadingly named) 'Nordic Renaissance' (Blanck 1911) is closely connected with the work of the Geneva historian Paul Henri Mallet (1730–1807) and his *Histoire de Dannemarc*, commissioned by the Danish government. Mallet prefixed the historical work proper, which began to appear in 1758, with an introductory description of pre-Christian culture and customs, the *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc, ou l'on traite de la religion, des loix, des mœurs et des usages des anciens Danois* ('Introduction to the History of Denmark, in which Are Treated the Religion, Laws, Customs and Habits of the Ancient Danes'). This was published in Copenhagen in 1755 as the first part of a multi-volume study. The *Introduction* was accompanied by a supplement published in 1756, entitled *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* ('Monuments of the Mythology and Poetry of the Celts and Particularly of the Ancient Scandinavians'). The supplement was intended to illustrate the statements of the *Introduction* with extracts from primary sources, in particular from Snorri's *Edda* and the Poetic Edda as well as a few skaldic poems. Since the *Introduction* reached so far back into

Julia Zernack is Professor of Scandinavian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. She works on Old Norse literature, its post-medieval reception, the history of Old Norse Studies and modern Scandinavian literature.

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Northern antiquity that on occasion all inhabitants of the North appeared to be regarded as 'Danes', it almost inevitably gave the impression that the Old Norse mythology and poetry introduced in the *Monumens* represented a tradition shared throughout the entire North.

With some justification, Mallet is regarded as the main trail-blazer of the international reception of the pre-Christian religion of the North and of Old Norse mythology and poetry (Blanck 1911; Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999). However, he should not be called a 'pioneer' (Beck 1934: 12) since he mostly presented the results of earlier research, particularly of the seventeenth-century Latin-language scholarship from Scandinavia (see Part 3 in this volume). Mallet did not have any further-reaching insights of his own. Instead he pursued an angle of interpretation which was highly topical in the middle of the eighteenth century and which he applied to the history of Scandinavian antiquity as well as to its sources. In Mallet's version, selections from Snorri's *Edda* and from Norse poetry had been made for ease of reading, rendered readily accessible in the *lingua franca* of the Enlightenment and related to contemporary political and aesthetic debates. Thus Mallet allowed this matter to develop an appeal it had never before possessed. This is shown not least by the fact that even though the majority of educated people of the age understood French well, both books were translated into five languages in quick succession: into Danish in 1756 (the *Introduction* only), into German in 1765 and 1777, into English in 1770, into Russian in 1785 and into Polish in 1807 and 1828.[1] Furthermore, traces of Mallet's influence can be detected in the poetry and historiography of Europe and North America until far into the nineteenth century.

It is noteworthy that it was precisely Mallet's French version of the *Edda* (and of Old Norse poetry) that provoked such an echo, since the *Monumens* were originally only envisaged as a supplement to the arguments made in the *Introduction* and thus a by-product of a work that pursued rather different aims as a politically-motivated, historical and ethnographical account of Nordic antiquity, intended as the prelude to a large-scale history of the Danish monarchy.

On the Origins and Publication History of the Histoire de Dannemarc

A look at the genesis and the publication history of Mallet's work reveals the political trends at work in his background. The *Histoire de Dannemarc* was conceived in the cosmopolitan cultural milieu of Copenhagen that had developed

[1] A full list of translations of Mallet's work can be found in the list of references at the end of this essay.

during the reign of Frederik V (1746–66). According to the customs of the age, the king relied on foreign expertise and appointed a number of his diplomats, secretaries and ministers from abroad. Among them were the Hanoverian count Johann Hartwig Ernst von Bernstorff (1712–72), an enlightened reformer, who as foreign minister played an important role in the Danish kingdom for twenty years, and the high lord steward Adam Gottlob von Moltke (1710–92) from Mecklenburg. Bernstorff assembled a circle of German poets and scholars in Copenhagen with the intention of leading Denmark out of its provincial isolation. The most famous among them were the authors Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803) and Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737–1832) (see Magon 1926; Eaton 1929). A number of French-speaking intellectuals were also called to Copenhagen, Mallet among them. Like him, many of them were from Geneva (Eaton 1931: 324, 346–62).

Paul Henri Mallet was born in Geneva on 30 August 1730 and was the descendant of French fugitives. He studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the university there; one of his teachers was Jacob Vernet (1698–1789), a proponent of the Enlightenment who apparently drew Bernstorff's attention to Mallet in the early 1750s (Stadler 1924: 18, 23). At Bernstorff's instigation, Mallet was appointed as Professor of French Language and Literature in Copenhagen in 1752. He returned to Geneva in 1760 to work as a historian and died there in 1807. At the time Mallet came to Copenhagen in 1752, Moltke had already intended for some time to commission a French-language history of the Danish monarchy. He had had no luck with Mallet's predecessor in the chair at the academy at Copenhagen, Laurent Angliviel de la Beaumelle (1726–73), but found Mallet to be very receptive to the idea. Mallet learned the Scandinavian languages and became familiar with the literature so quickly that he was able to submit the first volume in 1755, having been commissioned in 1754 in the name of the king to write the history.

Moltke's plan of a French-language history of the Danish Empire was a reaction to a political debate reaching back into the seventeenth century that showed Denmark in a particularly bad light. The object of contention was Denmark's transformation into a hereditary monarchy in 1660. By virtue of this, Denmark had become the first country in Europe in which absolute royal power had become constitutionally fixed. This had happened with the explicit consent of the estates who had confirmed the constitution (the so-called *lex regia*). In 1694, Robert Molesworth (1656–1725), the former British envoy to Copenhagen, published *An Account of Denmark, as it was in the Year 1692*, which described the conditions in the Danish kingdom and was critical of absolutism (see Haakonssen 2008). It was reprinted until long into the eight-

eenth century and translated into French in 1714, in which form it was able to influence French historiography and political theory. Denmark here functioned as a negative example of modern despotism. In the middle of the eighteenth century it is described in this way, for example, in the writings of Voltaire (1859: 333–36) and of Montesquieu, who in 1734 complained that kings were able to execute their power more arbitrarily in Denmark than anywhere else in Europe: *Aussi voyons-nous aujourd'hui les rois de Danemarck exercer le pouvoir le plus arbitraire qu'il y ait en Europe* (1858: 222). In the face of such accusations, the Danish government regarded a French-language history of Denmark as necessary to refute the criticism and enhance the international reputation of the monarchy.

In the light of statements such as the one just cited, it seems remarkable that Mallet construes his justification of the Danish kingdom in 1755 as a type of modern historiographical synthesis inspired by Montesquieu. Already in the preface he cites Montesquieu's famous statement about Scandinavia as *la ressource de la Liberté de l'Europe* ('font of liberty of Europe', Mallet 1755: 8; see Blanck 1911: 41–45; Beck 1934: 19–26), which reinterprets the critical notion of the 'barbarians' from classical antiquity as something positive and transforms the stereotype into an argument against absolutism: the peoples of the North were superior to all others because they broke the chains of tyranny and slavery that had been forged in the south — an allusion to the Migration Period and the role of the Germanic peoples in the fall of the Roman Empire, which was viewed as the historical point of origin of political liberalism in the eighteenth century, in particular in England and France (Kidd 2008). Montesquieu relies on the Swede Olof Rudbeck the Elder (1630–1702) and through him on the sixth-century historian Jordanes, who describes the Scandinavian peninsula as the European 'forge of nations' in the fourth chapter of his history of the Goths. Since Mallet is working on behalf of the Danish government, he is unable to follow this Gothicizing argument (1755: 26–27), which was after all intended to legitimize the great power claims of Denmark's rival, Sweden. However, he takes inspiration from Montesquieu's positive interpretation of the Germanic migrations by beginning his rehabilitation of the Danish monarchy of the eighteenth century with an extensive disquisition on the history of the customs of the freedom-loving Northern peoples in ancient times. Their great historical achievements are said to have been disregarded and judged as 'barbaric' even though they exerted the greatest influence on the shape of Europe up to Mallet's own time (1755: 3–4, 6, 126). Thus in his history of Denmark, Mallet, the republican from Geneva, primarily focuses on a contemporary and much-debated problem of political theory: the question of the origin of freedom and

of a form of government without oppression (Kidd 2008). The royal commission thus demanded a remarkable balancing act of him: reaching back to an idealized past, he appropriated Montesquieu's ideal of freedom for a history of the Danish monarchy, without at the same time offending his patron who ruled with absolute power — a despot by Montesquieu's standards (see Beck 1934: 15; Wilson 1996: 61).

There was, therefore, probably a diplomatic aspect to Mallet's decision to focus on Old Norse antiquity and poetry in 1755/56 and only to discuss Danish history since the Middle Ages a few years later. All three works — *Introduction*, *Monumens* and *L'Histoire de Dannemarc* — appeared in Geneva in 1763 in a joint and expanded edition in six volumes, which is of greater significance for the history of Mallet's impact than both the first edition and the third edition of 1787.[2]

The Introduction *as a Historical Ethnography of the North*

Already with the *Introduction* Mallet offers far more than a reconstruction of the prehistory of Denmark; rather, he presents a comprehensive historical ethnography of the North. This is only partially explained by the fact that the Danish kingdom at this time encompassed Norway, Iceland, Greenland as well as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein and thus a large part of the Northern region. The blurring and extending of geographical boundaries is rather a distinctive aspect of Mallet's view of history. It takes up the ancient opposition of North and South and at the same time appropriates the medieval Icelandic concept of the *Norðrlönd*, the countries of the North, as an autonomous cultural area (see von See 1999; Sverrir Jakobsson 2009). For Mallet, Denmark, together with Scandinavia as a whole, forms part of this vast region in the North of Europe, whose people — *les anciens peuples du Nord* ('the ancient peoples of the North') (1755: passim) — he regards as so closely related both genetically and culturally that he subsumes them under the generic term 'Celts' (1755: 46 n. a; 1756: *Avant-propos* 6, *Edda* 99). In this, he follows Simon Pelloutier's history of the Celts of 1740 (1755: 9), which was very influential at the time. The peoples of the North were said to have spoken the same language originally and to have shared a common culture and religion, which Mallet likewise calls 'Celtic': *C'est cette religion Celtique que les Européens peu-*

[2] A list of the various editions of Mallet's work can be found in the references list at the end of this essay.

vent appeller avec fondement la Religion de leurs peres ('It is this Celtic religion, which the Europeans are with good reason able to call the religion of their fathers') (1756: *Avant-propos* 6).

Mallet explains the origin of the 'Celtic' peoples from the euhemeristic immigration story of medieval Icelandic historiography according to which the inhabitants of the North had migrated to Scandinavia from Asia under the leadership of Odin and the Æsir, where they had established 'an outpost of classical culture and learning' (Clunies Ross 1998: 43). Like most historians of the eighteenth century, Mallet takes the medieval tale as historical fact and locates the origin of the Æsir (or Scandinavians) in the 'swamps of Scythia' (1755: 4). In his terminology, 'Scythian' is thus synonymous with 'Celtic'. In this way, he perpetuates the idea — which had been infectiously popular since late antiquity — that the noble Northern people of the Scythians were to be considered the ancestors of almost all Western European nations (see Johnson 1953). The Scythian tribe of the 'Æsir or Asians' (1755: 37) were said to have left their homeland in around 70 BC under a leader called Sigge, who had taken the name of Odin, the highest Scythian god, to find refuge in a region unknown to the Romans. From there they had gradually taken control of the Scandinavian countries (1755: 36–44).

In Mallet's work, this migration hypothesis is combined with arguments from climatology, again taking up ideas by Montesquieu (see Fink 2004: 95–96): in their wanderings, the Scythians originally spread their simple, warlike religion, their form of government, based on reason and freedom, and their indomitable spirit all over Europe. However, they lost these qualities under Roman rule. Only the tribes who had emigrated to cold regions like the Æsir (i.e., Scandinavians) were said to have maintained their spirit and independence and to have regenerated themselves continually by incorporating other peoples following in the wake of their migrations until their unrest and savageness could no longer be contained and prompted further migrations and thus led to the fall of Rome. The peoples of the North had returned independence, equality and natural simplicity to the Scythians who had become weak under Roman rule. From that mixture of customs resulted that specifically European culture which was still prevalent in the eighteenth century (1755: 4–6). The fact that the Danish people accepted a despotic form of government in modern times stands in obvious opposition to this construct. Mallet again invokes climatology to explain this, more specifically a change in climate: this change also affects the behaviour and way of life of peoples who at the same time become more independent from the influence of the climate in the course of their development through contact with other civilized peoples (1755: 253–55).

It is avowedly not Mallet's aim to provide a conventional depiction of political history in the *Introduction* (1755: 2–3, 35, 126). Instead he offers a mostly comparative reconstruction of religion and custom in Northern antiquity: partly an early example of comparative religious history,[3] partly a kind of history of mentalities *avant la lettre*. He bases his work on many sources: mostly on Tacitus, also on Saxo Grammaticus and relevant Scandinavian and Icelandic writings of the seventeenth century, in particular those of Thomas Bartholin (1659–90), Ole Worm (1588–1654), Stephan Stephanius (1599–1650), Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) and Thormod Torfaeus (1636–1719). Mallet also makes use of the first printed edition of Snorri's *Edda* by Peder Hansen Resen (1665) and other contemporary works besides Pelloutier's *Histoire des Celtes* ('History of the Celts') (1740), in particular Olaf Dalin's *Svea Rikes Historia* ('History of the Nation of Sweden'), published in 1747 (see Chapter 4.4 above).

Mallet unfolds his panorama of Nordic culture in five large sections or 'books'. The first one begins with a short description of the geographical conditions before dealing with the oldest inhabitants of Denmark and Odin's migration to the North. This is followed by Mallet's widely acclaimed account of the ancient religion of the North in prominent position in the second book, before Book III explains the constitutions and the laws of the ancient Scandinavian societies. Book IV is concerned with the ancient Scandinavians' passion for war, and Book V describes their customs, habits and art. Mallet's overarching perspective, which is clearly focused on the present, gives coherence to these seemingly heterogeneous topics. He endeavours to justify his view of the political landscape of Europe in his own time through recourse to ancient history and he therefore emphasizes the liberal aspects of the ancient Nordic societies. Among these he particularly counts their form of government, in which people's assemblies were meant to have played a constitutive role beside the elective monarchy. This could be seen particularly in the Icelandic 'free state', a kind of 'historical laboratory' of republicanism (Horstbøll 2008: 213–14). Mallet also recognizes the Northern peoples' love of freedom in their passion for war (1755: 127–29) and their defiance of death. These hardened warriors were also meant to have shown knightly gallantry towards women: because lust does not thrive in the rough Northern climate, Norse men — unlike their counterparts in the East — held women in high regard and appreciated them as equal mem-

[3] On the debated question of the relationship between the comparison of religions of the early modern period and modern religious studies, see Mulsow 2012.

bers of society and as counsellors, a supposed facet of their life that had already elicited praise from Tacitus (1755: 128–29, 196–201).

All of this stands in obvious contrast to Mallet's emphasis elsewhere on the primitive nature of Nordic culture in antiquity. This view is very closely connected with his rationalist criticism of the pagan religion of the Northern peoples, as particularly developed in the second book of the *Introduction*.

Criticism of the Northern Peoples' Polytheism

Mallet finds the starting point for his outline of a religion in a primordial, natural religion of reason, based on the belief in a creator-god whose authority imparts morals and customs. In this, he follows the ideas of Deism which postulates that this simple religion, which is meant to have existed everywhere before the positive or historical religions, was adulterated over the course of history through the ignorance of unenlightened men and the deceits of power-hungry priests, so that the original belief in one sole highest god was succeeded by polytheistic religions grown from superstitions, idolatry and hero-worship.[4] Mallet wishes to recognize such a development from an original reason-based religion in the accounts of *Gylfaginning* and its understanding of Odin. He finds the primitive original beliefs in their 'pure form' (*dans son état de pureté*, 1755: 48) in the religion of the Scythians. His main evidence is Tacitus's idea of the *Regnator omnium Deus*, who is meant to correspond to that most noble and oldest god described by Snorri in the third chapter of *Gylfaginning* (1755: 49 n. a, 54). Thus the Scythians originally believed in one sole higher entity that controlled all things, possessed infinite power, unlimited understanding and immutable justice and only demanded adherence to a few moral laws (1755: 49). This primordial religion was meant to have been maintained for longer among the Scythians than among the Greeks or the Egyptians, as argued by Pelloutier. Over time, though, it deteriorated due to the introduction of rituals which were partly ludicrous and partly cruel. Thus Mallet differentiates fundamentally between two distinct epochs in the religion of the Scythians or Celts, namely, the era of the older primordial religion and that of its decline. According to Mallet, the decline began with the Æsir's arrival in the North: the

[4] From the extensive literature on the relationship of the Enlightenment with religion and mythology, see for the present context Schmidt (1989); on the rationalistic interpretation of polytheism as fraud, Manuel (1959). See further Gockel (1981), Stroumsa (2010) and Effinger and Krenn (2012). The annotated anthology of sources by Feldman/Richardson (1972), which also pays attention to Mallet (1972: 199–209), is particularly useful.

immigrant 'Asian prince' Sigge, also known as Odin, not only subjugated the indigenous people who lived in a condition of deepest ignorance (*dans les plus ténebres de l'ignorance*, 44) and introduced new customs into their lives, but also induced them by means of magic to worship him as a god in place of the original Odin. In Mallet's view, it is the polytheistic religion derived from this deceit which stands behind the narratives of *Gylfaginning* and the other Old Icelandic sources translated in *Monumens*.

For Mallet, connecting his Deism with the euhemeristic construct of *Gylfaginning* would have seemed to be of contemporary relevance. Euhemerism was no less important to the Enlightenment's criticism of religion than it had been to medieval theologians and historiographers (see Böldl 2000: 69–121). Apart from Snorri, Mallet also cites the arguments of Antoine Banier (1673–1741), a scholar of antiquity who, in his *La Mythologie et les fables expliquées par l'histoire* (1738–40; *The Mythology and Fables from the Ancients explain'd from history*, 1739–40) had updated the idea of euhemerism for a rational interpretation of Greek myths by distinguishing between 'natural' and 'ensouled', that is artificial, gods (*les Dieux naturels*, *les Dieux animés*, 1738–40: 1, 411–17).[5] The idea that an original natural god Odin was supplanted by a fraudulent Asian of the same name, who thus founded a new religion, was likewise common in the eighteenth century. Among Mallet's sources, it is also propounded by the Swede Dalin (1747: 162–63; see Beck 1935, Böldl 2000).

In the chapter on religion in the *Introduction*, Mallet traces the degeneration of the natural Odinic religion in nearly thirty pages and describes the resultant polytheism as an intrinsically contradictory idea of beliefs, characteristic of an early stage in the development of a people, far removed from reason. While he himself is not particularly enamoured of this religion — he considered it to be *bizarrement chargée de mille faux ornemens* ('bizarrely adorned with a thousand false ornaments') (1755: 51) — his description held enormous appeal for his readers (van Tieghem 1924: 111): such a vivid and detailed picture of the religion of the North was not available anywhere else at a time when 'primordial' cultures and religions were beginning to be discovered in the eighteenth century (see Effinger and Krenn 2012).

Mallet first introduces the three main deities Odin, Frigga or Frea, and Thor. Based on Snorri's list of the Æsir in *Gylfaginning*, he sets a number of sub-deities next to them, among them Frey, Niord, Balder, Tyr, Bragé, Iduna and Heimdal, as well as Loke as the font of evil and the father of those mon-

[5] Mallet's reference to Banier (1755: 55 n. a) is misleading; the discussion of the nature of the gods is already in volume 1 (bk v, ch. 2) of *La Mythologie et les fables expliquées par l'histoire.*

sters which will defeat the gods in the last battle. To these are added the twelve goddesses mentioned in *Gylfaginning* and the valkyries (1755: 60–63). Mallet describes the cosmological and cosmogonic ideas of *Gylfaginning* and *Völuspá* extensively in order to immediately reinterpret them as reflexes of an unenlightened people's perception of nature. As such, the Scandinavians saw the will of a god behind all natural phenomena (1755: 64–68) and developed a characteristic belief in fate in the knowledge that any resistance against the will of this god would be futile. According to Mallet, this belief in fate strengthened their warlike nature and induced them to 'barbaric' misjudgements, blind audacity and defiance of death (1755: 69–70).

The discussion of the ancient Scandinavians' defiance of death, which takes up a large part of the fourth book of the *Introduction*, shows why religion receives a prominent place in Mallet's investigation: like Montesquieu, he sees religious beliefs as proof of a people's morality (1755: 100; 1756: *Avant-propos* 3–4), so that religion is able to explain not only the habits, customs and laws of the ancient Scandinavians but also their love of poetry and their warlike spirit (e.g., 1755: 131; 1756: *Avant-propos* 6, 16). However, in addition to their belief in fate, their ideas about the end of the world and the condition of man after death were also seen as factors in their bravery. These ideas (1755: 70–74) are meant to show that the Scandinavians did not only believe in the immortality of the soul but also in the fact that man's situation in the afterlife was determined by his adherence to moral laws in this life. Like Thomas Bartholin seventy years earlier in his treatise about the death-defiance of the ancient Danes (*Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres*, 1689), Mallet infers from this that the prospect of the infinite joys of Odin's palace at Valhalla and the fear of the places of punishment in the afterlife made the Norse warrior gladly seek out even the most gruesome death (1755: 75). In Montesquieu's writings Mallet was able to find a reference which stated that defiance of death makes legislation unnecessary in a similar way to the climate — *Des hommes qui croient des récompenses sûres dans l'autre vie échapperont au législateur: ils auront trop de mépris pour la mort* ('Men who are sure of their reward in the afterlife elude the legislator: they disdain death too much') (Montesquieu 1748, bk XXIV, ch. 14) — and can therefore be interpreted as a typical characteristic of a freedom-loving people.

The idea that it was religion in particular which showed the character of a people and the diversity of human beings and their cultures is based on insights which were being gained in Europe during the early modern period through encounters with the indigenous peoples of the New World. In the seventeenth century their cultures were mainly described by Christian missionar-

ies. For obvious reasons, these descriptions focused above all on the religious practices of the 'savages' so that problems of religion were frequently the focus of European engagement with these cultures (see Stroumsa 2010: 15). At the same time, this new ethnographic knowledge relativized the Europeans' view of their own culture(s) and their concept of the development of mankind. They sought to explain the history of the latter in analogy to the history of the human individual and its mind; a hypothesis which was fundamental to the historical philosophy of the Enlightenment but which ultimately goes back as far as Augustine (see Gisi 2007). The genesis of the human race is meant to mirror that of the individual whose development takes place in three stages, from sensualism via the power of imagination to reason. Thus, like any individual, the development of the species as a whole contains a childhood phase: precisely that stage of development which the indigenous American peoples were meant to have reached at that time. In these cultures Europeans therefore encountered their own past, a thought that found its pithiest — and therefore often quoted — expression in John Locke's axiom: 'In the beginning all the world was America' (Locke 1970 [1689]: 319). In light of this, it seemed obvious to place the present-day 'savages' on the same level as the 'barbarians' of European antiquity (see Gisi 2007: 114–49; Logemann and Pfisterer 2012). Indeed, such cultural comparisons became almost topos-like in the eighteenth century (Gisi 2007: 147). Two works that were epoch-making in this context were *Discours sur l'origine des fables* ('Treatise on the Origin of Fables') by Bernard de Fontenelle (1657–1757) and *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* ('The Customs of the American Savages, Compared to the Customs of Early Times') by Joseph-François Lafitau (1681–1746). These works — with different intentions — compared the uncivilized peoples of America to the ancient Greeks and again found correspondences in the pagan religions and their mythologies. This also threw a new light on the antiquity of all other European peoples by giving the impression that these beliefs were not characteristic of any one people, but of an early stage in the development of mankind.

Mallet was familiar with these concepts, although he did not acquire this knowledge systematically, and he does not explicitly refer to Fontenelle or Lafitau. However, he emphasizes that he is describing *une nation dans son enfance* ('a nation in its infancy') (1755: *Preface* 11) and adduces cultural comparisons with contemporary America among other examples to illustrate his point (1755: 76, 87). He analyses the pagan cults of the Northern people and the 'abhorrent' practice of religious sacrifice in this light. In Mallet's view, this practice only became established in the course of religious degeneration and

found its gruesome nadir in human sacrifice (1755: 82–87). Mallet regards the barbarism evident in this practice as independent of time and place and considers it to be a characteristic of every 'ignorant people'. As Fontenelle had taught, humans were the same everywhere, and it lay in their nature that ignorance led to fear which in turn gave rise to brutality (1755: 87).

According to Mallet, the peoples of the North were therefore also subject to limitations through ignorance, in particular in the second of the two epochs of religion. In his study he wants to show how they were able to overcome these limitations under the advantageous influence of the climate. For this, he uses criticism of religion because it provides a way of measuring what counts as a particular cultural achievement of the Northern peoples, namely, those of their characteristics and accomplishments that seem unusual to their stage of development and thus set them apart from other ignorant peoples. One example of such an achievement is the journeys to Vinland made by medieval Icelanders, which anticipates the world historical achievement of Columbus:

> Mais si dans un siècle où toute l'Europe languissoit dans l'ignorance, [...] où presque tout ce qui se fit de grand & de memorable, fut des perfidies & des cruautés, s'il est dis-je étonnant dans un siècle si malheureux de voir un des peuples qui avoit le plus retenu à certains égards la rouille de ancienne barbarie, couvrir les mers de ses vaisseaux, fonder au loin des colonies, & decouvrir des terres éloignées & inconnues, l'étonnement ne redouble-t-il pas en le voyant s'ouvrir une route jusques dans le nouveau monde, & faire cette même découverte qui a changé longtems après la face du nôtre, & a mérité une si grand gloire à ses auteurs? (1755: 174–75)
>
> (But if in a time, in which all of Europe languished in ignorance [...] and almost everything that was grand and memorable consisted of perfidies and cruelties, it is astonishing to see in such an unhappy time one of the peoples which have in certain aspects retained the rust of ancient barbarism, cover the seas with their ships, found distant colonies and discover far-away and unknown lands; the astonishment is so much the greater on seeing this people open up a path to the New World and make the same discovery which changed the face of our world a long time afterwards and which brought such great glory to its originators.)

Mallet was thus not primarily interested in the pagan religion of the North. In a way typical of his time, he analyses it with the intention of reconstructing a specific cultural state. It is only apparently paradoxical that in precisely this way his criticism of religion paves the way for an extensive description of Nordic mythology in the *Monumens*. Mallet's decision to associate mythology with poetry further contributes to this.

Mythology as Poetry

Mallet names *L'Edda des Islandois & quelques autres anciennes poésies où la même Mythologie est enseignée* ('The Edda of the Icelanders and Some Other Ancient Poems which Depict the Same Mythology') as his most important sources (1755: 51). At the same time, he distinguishes between mythology and poetry on the one hand and religion proper on the other: *qu'on doit distinguer [...] la croyance des Sages d'avec les fables ou la Mythologié des Poëtes* (the faith of the wise needs to be kept apart from the tales and mythologies of poets; 1755: 48). This distinction even has an impact on the structure of *Introduction* and *Monumens*. Mallet moves the detailed discussion of his primary sources from the section on religion to the chapter about literature in Book V: *C'est une discussion qui trouvera sa véritable place dans l'article que je reserve à l'ancienne Littérature du Nord* ('This is a discussion which finds its appropriate place in the chapter I have intended for the ancient literature of the North') (1755: 52). The account of the mythology is relocated to the *Monumens*. This method virtually mirrors the way of thinking by which the Enlightenment effects the rehabilitation of mythology even in the process of rationalistic refutation of pagan religion: by allocating it a new place as 'fables', separated from religion (see Feldman and Richardson 1972: 199; Starobinski 1990).

Even though Mallet disapproves of the myths themselves as the products of an irrational imagination from an early stage of cultural development, there are two reasons in particular why the mythological tradition is important to him: first, the scarcity of sources with regard to the pagan religion; second, Mallet thinks, like Montesquieu, that the spirit of barbarian peoples is most easily understood if taken from their own words, rather than relying on the 'foreign' ethnography of the Greeks and Romans (1756: *Avant-propos* 10–12; see Kirkeby 1988: 444).

The 'Edda of the Icelanders' (1755: 51), on which Mallet bases all of his arguments, refers to Peder Hansen Resen's *Edda Islandorum*, the first printed edition of Snorri's *Edda*, which was published in Copenhagen in 1665, accompanied by editions of *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*. The text of this edition is not based on medieval manuscripts but on the version of the so-called *Laufás Edda*, which had been compiled at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the Icelandic priest Magnús Ólafsson (1573–1636) (see Chapters 3.1–2 above). In this version, the texts of Snorri's *Edda* are reorganized according to encyclopaedic principles: all narrative texts at the beginning, categorized as *Dæmisögur* (*exempla*) or *Apologi* ('fables'), followed by alphabetical lists of poetical circumlocutions (*heiti* and *kenningar*). When Mallet speaks of 'the

Edda', he is frequently referring to this arrangement of the text, but occasionally to *Gylfaginning* on its own, which he regards as the 'actual' Edda (1756: *Avant-propos* 15). He is remarkably approving of these sources, however not without explicitly distancing them from pagan religion. His justification for this comes from the classicist concept of *imitatio veterum* ('imitation of the ancients'), the importance of which for Mallet's understanding of mythology and poetry has been pointed out by Mats Malm (1996: 206–08). This concept is found for example in the following characterisation of Snorri's *Edda*:

> Et d'abord il est aisé de juger que l'Edda écrite en Islande pour la premiere fois, peu de tems aprés que la Religion Celtique venoit d'y être abolie, devoit avoir un autre usage que celui de faire connoître des dogmes à peine oubliés. [...] L'Edda entiere n'etoit qu'un cours de Poësie à l'usage des jeunes Islandois qui se destinoient à exercer la profession des Scaldes ou des Poëtes. Dans cet art comme dans les autres ceux qui se distinguent les premiers, acquiérent à mesure qu'ils deviennent anciens le droit d'être imités scrupuleusement, quelquefois meme dans ce qu'il y a de plus arbitraire. Les peoples du Nord accoutumés à voir Odin & Frigga, les Génies & les Fées figurer dans la Poësie, vouloient encoce y retrouver leurs noms, les voir agir, & les entendre parler conformément à l'idée qu'ils s'étoient une fois faite de leurs caracteres & des leurs fonctions. (1756: *Avant-propos* 13–14)
>
> (And thus it is easy to see that the Edda, written down for the first time in Iceland shortly after the abolition of the Celtic religion, has to have another use than making known religious teachings that were hardly forgotten. [...] The Edda as a whole was nothing but a text book of poetry for those young Icelanders who had decided to follow the profession of skald or poet. In this art, as in the others, those who distinguished themselves first earned the right to be imitated scrupulously, sometimes even in the most arbitrary things. The Northern peoples were used to seeing Odin and Frigga, genies and fairies represented in poetry and wanted to continue to find their names in it, to see them act and hear them speak according to the image that they had once formed of their characters and their functions.)

In Mallet's view, *Gylfaginning* depicts the most important religious principles of the Celts, but specifically *non d'après leurs Philosophes, & cette distinction est importante, mais d'après leurs Scaldes ou Poëtes* (not 'according to their philosophers' but 'according to their skalds or poets'). Overall, however, it offers a systematic mythology of a kind that the Greeks or Romans would not have been able to produce (1756: *Avant-propos* 20). Mallet sees *Skáldskaparmál* as proving that Snorri's *Edda* was ahead of its time to the same extent as the pre-Columbian discovery of the New World (see above). At any rate, under the influence of Resen's version of the text Mallet regards *Skáldskaparmál* as a poetic thesaurus similar in kind to the classicist normative poetics, *un recueil*

d'épithétes & de synonimes tirés des Poétes les plus celébres, tel que celui, qu'on met en plusieurs pays entre les mains des jeunes gens, qui s'appliquent à la Poèsie latine ('a collection of epithets and synonyms, drawn from the best poets, of the kind that in several countries one puts into the hand of young people who apply themselves to Latin poetry'). And while the listed epithets are not to his taste at all, Mallet is all the more impressed by the mere existence of such an encyclopaedia:

> Ce n'est pas sans étonnement, il faut l'avouer, qu'on trouve un Dictionnaire Poëtique [...] parmi ce peu de monumens qui nous restent de l'ancienne Scandinavie, c. à d. chez des Goths & ces Normans qui ont replongé l'Europe dans l'ignorance, & que plusieurs Nations ont eu de si justes sujets d'accuser de férocité & de barbarie. Eut-on crû devoir attribuer à de pareils hommes un gout si décidé pour un art qui semble exiger des ames sensibles, des esprits cultivés, des imaginations vives & fleuries, & qu'on jugeroit au premier coup d'œil être un des derniers raffinemens du luxe & de l'abondance? (1756: *Avant-Propos* 15–16)

> (One has to admit that it is not without astonishment that one finds a poetic dictionary among those few monuments that remain to us from ancient Scandinavia, i.e., from those Goths and Normans who plunged Europe back into ignorance and who many nations have justly accused of ferocity and barbarism. Would one have believed that one had to attribute to such people a decided taste for an art which seems to require a sensitive soul, a cultivated spirit, lively and vibrant powers of imagination and which one at first sight would consider one of the ultimate refinements of luxury and abundance?)

Snorri himself is considered by Mallet as a man out of his time in a positive sense. His *Heimskringla* is marked not only by the characteristics of the classicist ideal of style — clarity, order and simplicity — but also by *bon sens*, the common sense closely related to reason (1756: *Avant-propos* 18). Mallet usually considers as positive those aspects that appear to correspond to his own time and therefore he is fascinated by the modernity of Snorri's *Edda* (in the form of the *Edda Islandorum*), which stands in contrast to *le goût ancien* (the 'ancient taste'; 1756: *Avant propos* 14) of skaldic poetry.

Mallet judges skaldic poetry itself much less warmly. With its 'artificial and repulsive' mode of expression, it stands in opposition to the stylistic ideal of simplicity and clarity. This can be seen clearly in his criticism of the epithets listed in *Skáldskaparmál* as 'dark', 'childish' and 'unimaginably bizarre' (1755: 246). The skalds had a predilection for 'hyperbolic and figural phrases', 'lofty or monstrous similes', 'allegories and symbols', which was seen as some kind of Asiatic legacy. On account of their opacity, these devices could be seen as a sign of intel-

lectual capability but apart from that they led directly to the language of kennings which was a particular cause of irritation for enlightened human beings because it was highly unnatural (1755: 244–46). Mallet briefly discusses a few examples of the way this language operates, but his interpretation of Snorri's *Edda* in the spirit of a classicistic aesthetics of imitation (cited above) leads to the inference that he only had a vague idea of the role of mythology in the art of the kenning. The mythological figures 'act' and 'speak' only rarely in skaldic poetry; rather they appear as elements of figurative language, mostly reduced to mythological abbreviations and metonyms (see Malm 1996: 208) unconnected to the content of the poem. The *Monumens* show that Mallet did not have the least bit of interest in this use of myths because poetic language has no role to play in his prose translations. Here the mythology is made available in sources which embed the mythological figures in epic contexts.

Concept and Sources of the Monumens

In the *Monumens* Mallet offers his contemporaries a reader-friendly annotated selection of his sources in French, partly in translation, partly in paraphrases, summaries and excerpts.[6] After an *Avant-propos* in which he sings the praises of the 'Edda of the Icelanders' and gives an account of his selection criteria (see Gigandet 2002), the translation of the explicitly 'Celtic' Edda begins with a rendering of *Gylfaginning* (*Vision de Gylfe: Prestiges de Har*, 1756: *Edda* 1–124). This is followed by a short summary of the content of *Skáldskaparmál* (*Idee de la seconde partie de l'Edda*, 1756: *Edda* 125–32). After this, Mallet offers an impression of the poetic Edda (*Idee de l'Ancienne Edda*, 1756: *Edda* 133–49) in which he summarizes the content of *Völuspá* (1756: 133–35) and provides a translation of *Hávamál*, whose stanzas he separates into two different poems, following Resen (*Havamaal, ou Discours sublime*, 'Hávamál or Sublime Speech', 136–43; *Chapitre Runique, ou la Magie d'Odin*, 'Runic Chapter or Odin's Magic', 144–49). The second of these is interrupted by a prose rendering of a few stanzas from *Baldrs draumar* (147–48). The last part of the book, *Odes et autres poesies anciennes* ('Odes and Other Ancient Poems', 150–78), contains prose paraphrases of Ragnarr's death song *Krákumál* (*Ode du Roi Regner Lodbrog*, 'Ode of King Regner Lodbrog', 152–54), the skaldic *Gamanvísur* ('Jesting verses') attributed to the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði (1015–66; *Ode de Harald le Vaillant*, 'Ode of Harald the Brave', 156–58) and the eddic

[6] Mallet's translation technique is discussed, for example, by Kirkeby 1988, Malm 1996: 203–10 and Roulin 1996.

praise poem *Hákonarmál* by Eyvindr skáldaspillir (*L'Eloge de Haquin*, 'Hákon's praise', 159–61) as well as of *Gríms rímur og Hjálmars* (*L'Histoire de Charles et de Grym roi en Suede, et de Hialmar fils de Harec roi de Biarme*, 'The History of Charles and Grím, King of Sweden, and of Hjalmar, son of King Harek of Bjarmaland', 164–76).

Mallet thus includes most witnesses of Old Norse poetry that were known and available in the mid-eighteenth century. He obviously did not know that far more eddic poems survived than *Völuspá*, *Hávamál* and *Baldrs draumar* (1756: *Avant-propos* 6, 17, *Edda* 133). His most important source was Resen's *Edda* edition, which would also have been a useful starting point because it included Danish and Latin translations besides the original Icelandic texts. By his own admission, Mallet had an incomplete understanding of Icelandic and repeatedly had to request help from the native speaker Jón Eriksson (1728–87), an Icelandic scholar living in Copenhagen (1756: *Avant-propos* 22–23). In addition, he used Johan Göransson's first edition of the Uppsala codex of Snorri's *Edda*, published in 1746, to check and complement Resen's text. This likewise contained translations (into Latin and Swedish), which Mallet demonstrably used (see Grape 1962–77: I, 66–75). On several occasions he was also able to consult the Uppsala codex itself (1756: *Avant-propos* 24).

The concept of the *Monumens* can largely be explained by Mallet's dependence on his sources, in particular on Resen. It does not show much more independence in the last section, *Odes et autres poesies anciennes*, which collects witnesses of varying provenance: the original of the rendering of *Krákumal* is taken from Ole Worm's *Literatura runica* of 1636 (197–227); Mallet knew *Baldrs draumar*, the *Gamanvísur* and *Hákonarmál* from Bartholin (1689: 632–40, 155–57, 522–24) and a retelling of *Gríms rímur ok Hjálmars* from Erik Julius Biörner's *Nordiska kämpa dater* ('Deeds of Nordic Heroes') (1737; see Kirkeby 1988: 462). The extent to which this selection reflected the tastes of the time is shown in particular by Mallet's rendering of *Krákumál*, which reports the death of King Ragnarr loðbrók and is attributed to him. The poem is one of the first Old Norse texts to appear in print in the modern era. Although it is likely to be an example of the more recent skaldic poetry of the twelfth century, it was viewed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a paradigmatic witness of the Viking era, which displayed those themes and motifs which were particularly ascribed to that period, such as a fearless warrior spirit and the heroic defiance of death (Heinrichs 1978). This had impressed a number of British recipients already in the seventeenth century (Clunies Ross 1998: 229–36, 248–53) before the poem began to shape Viking stereotypes in many languages in the eighteenth century, in particular through its use of the *ridens moriar*

('I am dying laughing') topos and the idea — based on the misinterpretation of a metaphor — that Vikings used the skulls of their enemies as drinking vessels (see Chapter 4.3 above).

For Mallet, Ragnarr's poem is historical proof of the truth of his concept of Nordic history which was inspired by Montesquieu: he sees in Ragnarr not only a brave opponent of tyranny and oppression who fearlessly seeks out death and is able to express this instantly in poetry (1755: 75, 134–35); from another passage in the text, he derives the view that the poem expresses that regard for women which he had cited in the *Introduction* as a characteristic aspect of the Northern people's love of freedom (1756: *Edda* 155). Most of the other witnesses in this section are intended to show precisely this propensity to combine love and martial bravery (Kirkeby 1988: 459–60). *Hákonarmál* is used to illustrate another facet of the Northern peoples' imagination by depicting the entrance of the king into Valhalla after his death in battle in striking imagery. Bartholin had already connected the poem closely to the *ridens moriar* motif of *Krákumál* (1689: 306–18, 522–24): it shows the entrance of Ragnarr into Odin's hall, which is alluded to in the last stanza of the poem, as a metaphor for a death happily received by the dying man.

Overall the *Monumens* is designed to document and illustrate the picture of customs and morals drawn in the *Introduction*. Mallet's detailed commentaries expose the Old Icelandic texts to religious-historical comparison with classical mythology in particular. This is, however, conceived in an apologetic and therefore tendentious manner: the Old Icelandic poetry is intended to show the cultural superiority of the 'barbarians' over those 'nations' which 'arrogate the privilege of wisdom and reason' (e.g., 1756: *Edda* 114). Mallet is able to use 'the Edda' as evidence of all of this because he has earlier declared it to be the most important witness for a construct of history without borders in space and time: he assigns the vast area of the North that had been settled by 'Celts' to antiquity as an epoch of anachronistic dimensions and declares that *toute cette partie de l'Europe à servi Odin & les Dieux de l'Edda, pendant tout le tems qui a précedé le Christianisme* ('this whole [!] part of Europe worshipped Odin and the gods of the Edda throughout the entire [!] pre-Christian era'; 1756: *Avant-propos* 22).

Unhistorical as it is, this idea was one of the main factors responsible for the success of Mallet's work. It gave the impression that the Nordic peoples were able to set their own powerful culture, paradigmatically embodied in Old Icelandic poetry, against the Graeco-Roman tradition. At the very moment this poetry became known internationally, it therefore became part of a cosmopolitan construction of history which not only provided an explanation for

the origin of political freedom but also promised to shed light on the ancestry of the non-classical peoples of Europe. This construct, which was at first geared towards the late Enlightenment and classicist positions, allowed itself to be combined in the second edition of 1763 with new aesthetic demands that prefigured Romanticism. Thus for the first time the Old Icelandic texts became tangible as literary monuments and aesthetic entities.

Mallet's Impact in Europe

What Mallet was offering his contemporaries with his misleading idea of a 'Celtic' *Edda* was nothing less than an alternative to the traditions of classical Antiquity. This by itself possessed a certain suggestive power which was enhanced by the fact that European intellectuals at about the same time as the publication of the *Monumens* discovered for themselves the (partly reconstructed, partly invented) songs of the Celtic poet Ossian, which the Scotsman James Macpherson (1736–96) had begun to publish and which became one of the greatest literary successes in modern history (Birkhan 2009: 336–81). From the start a connection between Ossian's Gaelic poetry and the Old Norse poetry was assumed. This is discussed, for example, by Hugh Blair (1718–1800) in his treatise *A Critical Dissertation on the Works of Ossian* (a supplement to his *Works of Ossian* [1765]). It includes an abbreviated English version of *Krákumál* as a typical example of the poetry of a 'barbarian' people (321–32). Even though Blair clearly marks the difference between Ossian's sensitive poetry and the 'savage' skaldic stanzas, he unintentionally inscribes *Krákumál* in the Ossianic corpus. In its wake, the poem became famous all over Europe (Blanck 1911: 117). In a similar fashion, the first German translator of Ossian, Michael Denis (1729–1800), a Jesuit priest from Vienna, incorporates the eddic poems *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* (as well as some skaldic poems) into an anthology of German Ossian poems and self-composed Bardic poetry, *Ossians und Sineds Lieder* (Denis 1784: IV, 5–80). In Denmark, Johannes Ewald (1743–81) has Baldr appear in front of an Ossianic backdrop in 1775, and in 1812 Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) includes the *Edda* and Shakespeare within 'Nordic poetic art' together with Ossian. The Russian Romanticists likewise equated the Norse tradition with the enthusiastically received Ossianic poems (Pochljobkin 1962: 94; Šarypkin 1972: 110–11), as did Germaine de Staël (1766–1817) in France: *Ces poètes scandinaves chantoient les mêmes idées religieuses, se servoient des mêmes images guerrières, avoient le même culte pour les femmes que le barde Ossian, qui vivoit près de cinq siècles avant eux* ('These Scandinavian poets sing of the same religious ideas, avail themselves of the same martial images, have

the same reverence for women as the bard Ossian, who lived nearly five centuries before them') (de Staël 1801: 297). Many more similar examples could be given to show that Mallet's revaluation of Old Norse poetry and the Ossianic poems strengthened each other's respective impacts.[7] With regard to Mallet, this is evidenced not least by the fact that his success is tied to the second editions of *Introduction* and *Monumens* in 1763: at the time of the first edition in the mid-1750s the Ossianic poems had not yet become available.

The majority of translations of Mallet's work are likewise based on the second edition of 1763 and therefore probably inspired by the association of Nordic antiquities with the Ossianic poems: 1770 saw the publication of *Northern Antiquities*, the influential translation by Bishop Thomas Percy (1729–1811) who had already contributed to the fame of Old Icelandic poetry with his Ossian-inspired *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763). In 1777, the German Jacob Schimmelmann published his much-derided *Isländische Edda*, based on the *Monumens* and Resen's *Edda* edition (see Krömmelbein 1998). In 1785, Mallet's *Introduction* and *Monumens* appeared in a Russian translation by Fedor Petrovič Moisenko (1754–81). A heavily abridged Polish version by the influential historian Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861) came out in 1807; this was followed by a greatly expanded version in 1828 (see Schlauch 1968; Baár 2010, 175–76). The anonymous Danish translation of Mallet in 1756 and the anonymous German version of 1765 are based on the first edition.[8]

These translations stand as examples of the 'internationalization' which the Eddic tradition underwent thanks to Mallet's French rendering, despite more than occasional criticism of his apparently arbitrary cuts to the original texts: the 'Celtic' interpretation obviously possessed greater persuasive power than any objections. By way of this interpretation, the poetry of ancient Iceland was incorporated into the cultural heritage of all nations that were able to connect their history in any way to that Northern region where Mallet had settled the 'Celts'. In addition to the Scandinavians, these were the Germans, the British, the Russians, the French and — with some delay — the Poles and the North Americans. The literature of all of these nations experienced a 'Nordic Renaissance' in Mallet's wake (see Blanck 1911; Krömmelbein 1995; Šarypkin 1972, 1980; Boyer 1986; Roulin 1996; Wajsblum 1971: 40–44; Thurin 1999), which a little later also

[7] Not that the impact of Mallet's *Edda* could ever have been as deep as that of the Ossianic poems; see Roulin 1996.

[8] Not all versions mentioned above are translations in the strict sense, even though they are to a large extent based on Mallet. Apart from Schimmelmann, this is particularly true of the Polish versions.

spread to the visual arts. This Nordic renaissance had further antecedents — such as the 'runic poetry' in Great Britain, where the Norse tradition had already become known in the seventeenth century, as it had done in Scandinavia; or Gothicism in Sweden — and soon incorporated other influences which derived, for example, from the rapidly increasing knowledge about Old Icelandic literature from the end of the eighteenth century onwards as a result of the publication of new editions and scholarly works (for these see Chapter 7.1).

For a long time, this current was shaped by Mallet's 'Celtic misconception', even though it had aroused criticism from the start, in particular from Mallet's English translator Percy. For the British historian Edward Gibbon (1737–94), however, the *Edda* was indeed the 'sacred book of the ancient celts' (Gibbon 1797: 274) and in his famously enthusiastic review of the German translation of Mallet in 1765, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was dreaming of a 'new German genius', which, with the help of the *Edda*, 'rises to new spheres on the wings of the Celtic imagination and creates poems which would always be more fitting for us than the mythology of the Romans' (1877[1765]: 74). Only later, in his 1796 treatise *Iduna, Oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* ('Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation'), does he advocate separating the Celtic from the Nordic and the German (1998 [1796]: 167). The mingling of the Celtic and Nordic-German past is also evident in the uncritical blurring of (Irish) bards and (Nordic) skalds which prefigured the Romantic image of the poet. This was an international phenomenon, evidence of which can be found for example in German, Russian and Polish literature (Düwel and Zimmermann 1986; Šarypkin 1972: 111–13; Janion 1991). These examples could easily be multiplied since the unhistorical mingling of Celtic and Nordic-German cultures is still very much alive today, inspired in the twentieth century by the works of J. R. R. Tolkien (Birkhan 2009: 532, 744, 762–63).

Mallet's Second Edition of 1763 and the Romantic Aesthetics of the Sublime

Leaving aside the blurring of geographical and temporal boundaries in the term 'Celtic', there was another crucial reason for the echo caused by Mallet's *Edda*. While in 1755/56 Mallet had shown Old Norse poetry from a perspective that made it relevant to contemporary political discussion, his revision in 1763 opened it up further to the aesthetic interests of the time. Lars Lönnroth (1996) rightly notes that for this to happen Mallet significantly modified his views on skaldic poetry, which he had presented in the *Introduction*. At the same time, Mallet's judgement of the poetry of his own time changed. It no longer provided an aesthetic norm, which was uncritically taken as a given and

against which skaldic poetry and Snorri's *Edda* had to be measured. Instead, poetry became the object of a polemic against reason; it was regarded as a *raisonnement rimé qui parle à l'esprit, & ne dit presque rien au cœur* ('a reasoning in rhymes, which appeals to the mind and has almost nothing to say to the heart'; 1763: I, 366). This hints at a change in Mallet's aesthetic perception which led him to recognize a difference between the poetics of skaldic poetry and the poetic ideas of his own time:

> Ce qu'il y avoit dans les anciennes poesies du Nord de plus propre à remuer, à frapper les esprits, est cela même qui nous paroit aujourd'hui le plus inintelligible, le plus bizarre, & le plus outré. Notre façon de voir & de sentir est si différente! Nous ne voulons que de clarté & de la justesse. Ils ne demandoient que des choses fortes & frappantes que nous trouverions aujord'hui hyperbolique & gigantesque. Ce qui contribute aussi beaucoup à rendre ce poesies obscures pour nous, c'est que le langage en est tout emprunté de la mythologie de ces tems, mythologie qui ne nous est pas aussi familiére que celle des Grecs & des Romains. (Mallet 1763: I, 366)
>
> (That which in the ancient poems of the North is most stirring, most striking to the spirit, is at the same time that which to us today seems the most unintelligible, the most bizarre and the most extravagant. Our way of seeing and feeling is so different! We do not want anything apart from clarity and appropriateness. They did not demand anything but strong and striking matters which we today consider hyperbolic and monstrous. What also contributes a lot to rendering these poems dark to us is that the language is completely borrowed from the mythology of that time, a mythology that is not as familiar to us as that of the Greeks and the Romans.)

In light of this he refrains from disparaging the language of kennings, even if he still regards it as artificial. He rather perceives a specific aesthetic potential in its figurative language and finds in it *beaucoup de grandeur, d'enflure, de sublime & d'obscurité* ('much that is grand, bombastic, sublime and dark'), that is to say exactly the opposite of that 'coldness' which he attributes to the poetry of his own time. Freed from classicist norms, the terms mentioned above, in particular 'darkness', now refer to the aesthetic characteristic of a poetry which deserves recognition as 'great poetry' precisely because of its archaic figurative language. It has its ancestral place among the 'savage' peoples who draw their images not from the imitation of famous poets, but straight from nature:

> La grande Poésie appartient peut-être plus aux peuples encore sauvages qu'à ceux qui sont civilisés & instruits. L'imagination des premiers est toujours frappée par les grands tableaux de la nature. Leurs passions ne sont point amorties par la contrainte de l'education & des loix. Ils sont obligé par la disette des idées & la stérilité de leur langues d'emprunter de toute la nature des images propres à exprimer leur pensées. (1763: I, 365–66)

> (Great poetry is perhaps reserved more for the still savage peoples than for those who are civilized and enlightened. The imagination of the former is always struck by the great canvasses of nature. Their passions are not yet curbed by the constraints of education and laws. They are forced by their shortage of ideas and the infertility of their language to borrow fitting images from the whole of nature in order to express their thoughts.)

In 1763, Mallet thus no longer measures poetic quality against classicist poetics; rather, he looks towards the ideal of a new aesthetics that prefigures Romanticism (see also Chapter 4.3). The change in Mallet's opinion was occasioned by a number of influential books which had appeared in the years between his first and second editions: Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* ('Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men') in 1755, Edmund Burke's essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757 and in particular *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland* by the Scot James Macpherson in 1760, that is, the poems of Ossian. These books all represented the new aesthetics that attempted to overcome classicism. The idea of the savage and the primitive as primordial and unspoilt stems from Rousseau, while the philosophical justification for the aesthetics of the sublime which set the primitive and the grand, the savage, the dark and the eerie against the classicist ideal of beauty comes from Burke. Thus there had been a change in aesthetic perspective between Mallet's first and second editions which he quickly latched onto (Lönnroth 1996, 102–03). In consequence Old Norse poetry appeared as a representative of this primordial sublimity on which the new aesthetic ideal was founded.

Mallet was not alone in his views. Thomas Percy and the English poet Thomas Gray (1716–71) looked for this particular — 'warmer' — power of expression which Burke wanted to ascribe to the languages of uncivilized peoples (Burke 2004: 198–99) and for 'eerie' images of horror and ruin in Old Norse poetry. Mallet's first edition had influenced Percy, Gray and Macpherson and guided their attention towards the Nordic tradition; in 1763 he was inspired in turn by the British poets' particular view of Old Norse poetry to adapt this poetry to the aesthetic needs of his time. This reciprocal effect is characteristic of the reception history of Old Norse literature in the short but extremely productive period in the 1750s and 1760s in which a large number of relevant works appeared in several countries. These were partly dependent on each other, partly reliant on the same sources and inspirations, and they reinforced each other's impacts. In conjunction with the translations which gradually started to appear at this time and which increasingly went back directly to

the Old Icelandic sources, they led to the development of an internationally recognizable 'Nordic' Romanticism.

'Norse' Poetry in Modern Languages

This concept started to develop from about the turn of the nineteenth century; among its representatives are Maurycy Mochnacki (1803–34) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49) in Poland, where this type of poetry is called *polska poezja północy* ('Polish poetics of the North') (see Chojnacki 1998; Schlauch 1960); Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847), Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846) and others in Sweden, where it is called *götiska diktning* ('Gothic poetry'); Robert Southey (1774–1843), William Wordsworth (1770–1850), Walter Scott (1771–1832) and others in Great Britain, where the phenomenon is called 'Norse Romanticism' (Rix 2012; see Omberg 1976; Mortensen 2000). For Germany one could mention — besides Herder — Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) or Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843) with his Nordic dramas; for Denmark, among others, the Romanticist Adam Gottlieb Oehlenschläger (1779–1850); for France, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) or Germaine de Staël (1766–1817); for Russia, Gavril Deržavin (1743–1816), Nikolaj L'vov (1753–1803), Pavel L'vov (1770–1825) and others. In Poland, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, several programmatic writings appeared independently of each other which all recommended replacing classical mythology with Norse mythology in the developing national literatures (e.g., Herder 1796, Oehlenschläger 1800, Mochnacki 1825, Westendorp 1826). Such programmes, which were in fact frequently merely promoted by individuals, were put into practice with great difficulty. Thus, the mythological references of this 'Nordic' poetry were only ever sufficient for a superficial Nordic flavour at best. Furthermore, one of the issues with the 'new' Nordic subjects was that the only models for their formal composition were classical in nature. Nevertheless, artists eagerly had recourse to these models (Gylfi Gunnlaugsson 2009), a problem which was even more evident in the visual arts (see Part 6 of this volume). As a consequence, the aesthetic renewal often failed to materialize. However, the underlying programme of a 'Nordic' poetics in the modern languages is still remarkable as a phenomenon of European literary history and has not yet received a great deal of scholarly attention (but see Part 5 in this volume).

The cosmopolitan conception of Mallet's construction of history was given up everywhere by the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The 'Nordic' poetry rather stands in the context of the incipient national

discourses which invented the national literatures precisely in order to more sharply define the contours of the Self against the Other — of one's own nation against other nations (see Räthzel 1997). It is for this project that the Nordic tradition is exploited by all cultures mentioned here: for each one, it was a monument of its own great past, which was used to legitimize national claims in the present.[9] Thus the harking back to the freedom-loving peoples of the North is always anti-classical in nature. Beyond that, its direction of attack is guided by the specific political requirements of each individual nation: in Denmark, it is pro-Danish, pro-Scandinavian and nationalist; in Germany, it is pro-German and exaggerated by racial ideology; in France, it is pro-Germanic and anti-nationalist; in Poland, it is pro-Polish and nationalist; in Russia, it is nationalist and anti-French, and so forth (see Beck 1934: 116).

It is not immediately obvious for any of these countries why Icelandic witnesses in particular should stand at the beginning of their national traditions. Therefore, the recourse to Nordic antiquity has never been accepted as a matter of course. On the contrary, it has almost always been necessary to justify it from a programmatic point of view. For some of the cultures involved, at least, there are historical points of connection: the Varangians, for example, stand at the beginning of Russian history, the emergence of Kievan Rus'; in the early periods of British history, there were Scandinavian kingdoms in the British Isles; in North America, there is the memory of the pre-Columbian 'discovery' of the continent by the Viking Leifr Eiríksson. It is a different case with Germany and Poland: there, such historical connections to the Scandinavian past did not exist, and therefore the role intended for Nordic subjects in the national poetry required an explanation. For German literature, this was taken on by Herder in his *Iduna* treatise of 1796; for Polish literature, nearly thirty years later by the Romanticist Mochnacki, a pupil of Lelewel, with the essay *O duchu i źródłach poezyi w Polszcze* ('On the Spirit and the Sources of Poetry in Poland', 1825). Herder and Mochnacki agreed that Old Norse poetry offered fresh subjects which were only waiting to be treated in a literary manner. However, they used very different arguments to claim the right to do this for their respective nations. Herder invoked the alleged tribal relationship between Germans and Scandinavians, while Mochnacki emphasized the ancient cultural contact between Slavs and Scandinavians who had always lived as neighbours in the same region:

[9] Such concepts are investigated in international comparison by Leersen 2006, Baár 2010 and Klaniczay et al. 2011.

> Traces of Norse laws, of trade, of institutions, customs and songs on our soil, blurred by the hand of time, prove that the homeland and the songs of the skalds must have been known to our ancestors. Let us extend the thread of Slavic poetry and the harvest of the collected native monuments and enrich them with the melancholy legends of the North. Then our literature, adorned with the immense national riches of so many peoples, will assume a new, individual character: the perhaps strange but primordial spirit of Nordic romanticism. (Mochnacki 1910 [1825]: 16)

While this idea was consistently rejected as failed (see, e.g., Lelewel 1865: 39–40; Schröder 1953: 31), Herder's assumption of a Germanic tribal relationship soon resulted in the incorporation of the *Edda* and everything Scandinavian into German heritage (see Chapters 5.1 and 7.1 below).

However, Mochnacki's explanation is particularly illuminating for the reception history of Mallet's work because it updates Mallet's boundary-expanding concept of the North. It thus throws a characteristic light on eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideas about that region from which the freedom-loving barbarian peoples had set out to put an end to Roman despotism. From today's point of view, it does not immediately make sense to think that Slavic and Scandinavian people were meant to have inhabited one and the same region in the North of Europe. After all, the Slavs are considered to be an East European or East-Central European people, whereas the Scandinavians are reckoned as West Europeans, like the British, whom Percy counted among the 'northern nations' in the title of his translation of Mallet. In the eighteenth (and into the nineteenth) century the view of the map of Europe was still dominated by the North/South dichotomy of the classical world-view. In this, the North was a region of immense, indefinite size, which stretched from Greenland via Great Britain and Scandinavia to Russia and Asia (Kliemann 2005). The intellectuals of the eighteenth century did not only locate various historical barbarian peoples from the Celts via the Gauls, Goths, Germans and Scandinavians to the Slavs in this large cultural geographical area but also their own contemporary cultures (Lemberg 1985). Thus all of them registered their national right as 'Nordic' cultures to Old Norse-Icelandic poetry. The possibility for this was to some extent already present in Mallet's cosmopolitan concept of the North. At least it provided the conditions for allowing 'the Edda' to be subsequently viewed nearly everywhere in Europe and North America as the vanishing point of a kind of alternative cultural history, which is, however, in most cases less considered to act as a virtual substitute for the classical tradition but rather as its equivalent.

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Part 5
The Romantics

5.1 – Images and Imageries of Norse Mythology in German Sentimentalism and Romanticism: From Herder to Heine

Sergej Liamin

The rediscovery of the Eddas in the literature of the eighteenth century correlates with the European revaluation of myth and mythology, which were no longer situated intellectually within the dichotomy of what was true and false, that is, of reasonable and unreasonable discourse, or within an *histoire des erreurs de l'esprit humain* ('history of errors of the human spirit', to express it in a formula of Bernard de Fontenelle). The philosophical and anthropological argument initiated by Giambattista Vico in *Scienza Nuova* ('The New Science') (3rd edn, 1744) primarily supposes myth to be an original form of a holistic kind of sense-making and an authentic expression of the reality experienced by the affective and intuitive faculties of mankind. According to that interpretation, the mythic imagination characterized the youth of mankind, when thinking and speaking were genuinely sublime and poetic. In application to the art and life of the age of Enlightenment, the focus of interest moved from a historicized to an actualized mythology: theoretical discussion was intended to find out not what the myths, or more specifically, the mythic discourse, was or might once have been, but what they could achieve in synthesizing a new poetry and a new society based on and moved by ration-

Sergej Liamin is Lecturer in German at the University of Lüneburg. His PhD thesis was on the reception of eddic mythology in German literature (Gerstenberg, Klopstock, Günderrode, Heine), and he has also published essays on opera (Rossini, Mussorgsky, Wagner, Strauss, Shostakovich).

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume 1: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 317–330
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ality and sensuality as well. At the same time, particularly in Germany, every scholar and every poet who turned his attention to the Eddas (especially in search of a 'lost' original German mythology) was confronted with the specific paradox of a mythological tradition which might or should be a hypothetically related or even an apologetically native one, but was in fact completely alien to recipients exclusively involved in the symbolic system of Greek mythology and the Christian religion.

In Germany, as well as in other European countries, a closer knowledge of Old Norse mythology was a result of the dissemination of the enlarged second edition (1763) of Paul Henri Mallet's *Histoire de Dannemarc* (on this, see Chapter 4.5 above). The first volume of the anonymous German translation, published in 1765, was immediately received by the twenty-year-old Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), whose short book review presents some of the most significant figures of interpretation that would soon determine the discussion of both the scholarly exploration and the literary adaptation of the Eddas. These figures would include the genetic relationship between the *alten Germanier* ('old Germanic peoples') and the *tapfren Dänen* ('valiant Danes') (constructed about the supposedly common 'national character' with its theme of Tacitean virtues); the integration of *Sitten unsrer Väter* ('the mores of our fathers') into the cultural memory of the readership; the affiliation of eddic and skaldic poetry with the aesthetics of the sublime; advantages of the Old Norse literary tradition in comparison to *für uns fremden und entfernten Alterthümer der Griechen und Römer* ('the antiquities of Greeks and Romans which are strange and distant for us'); the propaedeutic function of that original tradition, especially through its impact on the 'late-period' culture and literature of the present day; the evocation of a genius who induces *eine neue poetische Periode* ('a new poetic period') to replace the previously essential classical mythology with a cultural signification which is *uns immer angemessener* ('more adequate for us'); and lastly, the cosmopolitan orientation of such a yet-to-be-created poetry (Herder 1877–1913: I, 73–75)

At the beginning of his essay *Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts* ('On the Earliest Documents of Humankind'), a study in Old Testament criticism initiated by the first impression of the *Histoire de Dannemarc* (although it was not finished until 1769), Herder assumes every mythical world-view and all mythological poetry to be fashioned *nach Ideen seiner Zeit, seiner Nation, seiner Kultur* ('according to the ideas of its age, its nation, its culture') (Herder 1985–2000: V, 13) and reinforces the historico-genetic argument by referring to the cosmogony of the Edda. In the second volume of *Fragmente über die neuere deutsche Literatur* ('Fragments on Recent

German Literature'), published in 1766, such anthropological and ethnic specification of the poetic imagination is historized by resort to the conjectures of climate theory: *Die Religion der Skalder, die Odin aus den Morgenländern brachte; wie sehr veränderte sie sich auf dem rauhen skandinavischen Grund und Boden?* ('The religion of the skalds brought by Odin from the Orient, how much did it change upon the rough Scandinavian ground?') (Herder 1985–2000: 1, 283) Moreover, in *Fragmente einer Abhandlung über die Ode* ('Fragments of a Treatise on the Ode'), written in 1765, Herder invites poets to abandon the normative status of the classical heritage and exploit the cultural individuality of the native 'Nordic' tradition in respect of original composition: *Shakespears Schriften und die nordische Edda, der Barden und Skaldrer Gesänge müssen unsere Poesie bestimmen: vielleicht würden wir alsdenn auch Originalstücke von Oden haben* ('Shakespeare's writings and the Nordic Edda, the songs of the bards and the skalds must direct our poetry; and thereupon we may perhaps also receive some original pieces of odes as well') (Herder 1985–2000: 1, 85–86).

Just such an original piece of literary work is *Gedicht eines Skalden* ('Poem of a Skald') by Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737–1823), which appeared in print in 1766. This poem provides not only an example of heroic sentimental friendship and the archaic defiance of death, as it was treated by Thomas Bartholin in his compendium *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis* (1689), but also a lesson in the liberation of sensuality and the aesthetics of genius. In the embedded story situated in the pre-Christian age and determined by radical subjectivity (Cantos 2 and 3), the mythology especially provides the dramatic *Betrug einer höhern Eingebung* ('deception of a higher inspiration'), as Gerstenberg describes the effect on the audience produced by genius in his *Briefe über die Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur* ('Letters on Curiosities of Literature') (Gerstenberg 1767: 395), in which a manifesto of an anti-classical aesthetics and an encomium to Shakespeare border on pedantic polyhistoric notes on Northern antiquities. However, in the poem, the mythological 'higher inspiration' begins with a delusion and ends with a double suicide. In the frame story, which emphasizes the fundamental difference between past and present (cantos 1 and 4), the opposition of rationality and sensuality is provisionally overcome by the beauty of cultivated nature and more by the sublimity of religious song. In that way, the sensual confusion of unbounded mythical creativity, which both intensifies and depraves the poetic imagination, is to be superseded by what the Earl of Shaftesbury called the 'reasonable enthusiasm' of the poetry, wherein beauty and the sublime produce not an antithesis but a mutual effect of being united in the Divine.

Nonetheless, that ethical and aesthetic corrective is both approved and disapproved in canto 5 of the poem, which is a free interpretation of the 'twilight of the gods': the retraction of the discredited myth requires the usage of the mythology itself with its unique poetics and rhetoric. Finally, discourse about the myth (*sermo mythologicus*) and the mythic discourse itself (*sermo mythicus*) coincide in proclaiming the fall of polytheism in an enthusiastic and enigmatic backward-looking prophecy, which surpasses the hymn that has just been sung to the one and only God of order and harmony. Such an adaptation of the Eddic stanzas becomes both an innovation and a provocation in respect of a new concept of the sublime, which is completely detached not only from beauty and morality, but also from transcendence. Here, the sentiment of sublimity does not refer to the objectivity of the divine omnipotence but is derived from the subjectivity of the poetic imagination.

At the same time, the patriotic odes by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803), composed in 1766–67 under the influence of Ossian and the rediscovery of the Eddas, imagine a recreation or rather a reinvention of cultural memory, including a phantom specimen of ancient poetry in the German tongue. In competition with the masterpieces of the past and the present, from Homer to Milton, Old Norse mythology, which is presented as a *Mythologie auch unserer Vorfahren* ('mythology of our forefathers as well') (Klopstock 1974–: *Briefe* v.1, 46) becomes a substitute for the lost and not-yet-regained autochthonous poetry and substantiates its aesthetic co-equality with — or even its superiority to — the classical Greek and Roman heritage. Further, studies in the history of the German language and in German pre-Christian religion undertaken by Klopstock in the late 1760s accompany his invention of new *Lyrische Silbenmaße* ('Lyric Measures'), released first as a private print in 1764. In this connection, Klopstock's creative renovation of Eddic mythology assumes the function of performing an experimental poetology of *Wortbewegung* ('word movement'), which was designed to produce not a mimetic representation of a matter outside poetic language but sensation and emotion caused by the movement of words and rhythms themselves as a real 'action' of poetry.[1] Adapting only a few of the characters and images of the Eddas, Klopstock composes a self-reflexive mythology for language and literature: in the poetic pantheon of the new 'Celtic' odes such as *Skulda*, *Der Bach*

[1] The theoretical aspiration of that poetology was to replace or rather to surpass the classicist ideas of description and representation as reproduction (*Beschreibung* and *Vorstellung*) through the new categories of movement and presentation as production (*Bewegung* and *Darstellung*); cf. Menninghaus 1994; Behnke 2000.

('The Brook'), *Unsre Fürsten* ('Our Princes') and *Unsre Sprache* ('Our Native Tongue'), and also in several older odes where Greek mythology has been replaced by Eddic names and imagery, first of all in *Auf meine Freunde* ('To my Friends'), which was later renamed *Wingolf*, the most noble and mighty god is not Odin/Wodan, but Braga.

As a consequence, on the one hand, history and memory of the nation become the product of syntax and prosody: semantic echoes of artistic composition and passionate discourse of the sublime poet have to fill all the lacunae in the literary tradition. On the other hand, the introduction of the 'mythology of our forefathers' authorizes the innovative poetic device of 'word movement': for the eighteenth-century recipient, the figures of the Eddas were composed almost entirely of the rhythm and sound of their names, in contrast to the deities and heroes of the classical tradition along with their universally known iconography. Therefore, Klopstock had the same 'anti-mimetic' reason to reject Greek in favour of Norse mythology as Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in the twelfth book of his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ('Poetry and Truth'), had to reject the *Nebelbilder, ja bloße Wortklänge* ('shapes of mist, nay, mere verbal tones') (Goethe 1987: 1, 28, 143) signifying the deities of the Eddas. Nevertheless, proclaiming the cultural and aesthetic autonomy of his poetic practice, Klopstock needed the background of the archaic Greek lyric, which unites choric song and ritual dance. The two ice odes especially, *Braga* and *Die Kunst Tialfs* ('Tialf's Art'), both based on the postulates of climate theory and on the analogy between making a poem and skating on ice, stage a comparison and a competition between German and Mediterranean myth. Singing and swinging ultimately free and distinctly dissimilar to Apollo and Orpheus, a divine or human figure-skater becomes an embodiment of self-referential surpassing (*aemulatio*) and of the poetics of 'word movement'. In such an equal participation in the Greek and Eddic tradition, the poem creates a new or rather a contemporary myth in which the alien and the native, antiquity and modernity, the South and the North, reflect and comment upon one another.

Klopstock's perspective on mythology changes completely in his free verse poem *Der Hügel, und der Hain* ('The Hill and the Grove'). Here, re-enacting the choice of Hercules, the modern poet has to decide between the Greek myth of sensuousness and the Norse myth of goodness, including a catalogue of seven German virtues comprised of Eddic and Tacitean figures, with the character of Wodan as a supreme judge of the world (an idea very close to Klopstock as the author of *Messias*). Therefore, the modern poet is obliged to use the ancient fables, not in a poetic and artistic, but rather in a patriotic manner: a mythology of creativity is thus superseded by a mythology of morality and

community. Moreover, in the notes to his historical drama *Hermanns Schlacht* ('The Battle of Hermann') (1769), dealing with the victory of Germanic tribes united by the Cheruscian chieftain Arminius/Hermann over a Roman army in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, Klopstock harmonizes German polytheism with Christian monotheism, emphasizing the participation of 'our forefathers' in *prisca theologia*:

> Unsre Vorfahren, die Scythen, hatten in den ältesten Zeiten weder Untergötter, Götter, noch Halbgötter. Sie verehrten Einen Gott. Ihre Colonien in Europa änderten den Begriff von dem höchsten Wesen durch Zusätze, obgleich nicht so sehr, als die Verehrer Zevs oder Jupiters. (Klopstock 1974: VI.1, 145)
>
> (In the oldest time, our forefathers, the Scythians, had neither minor gods nor gods nor demigods. They adored the One God. Their colonies in Europe changed the idea of the Supreme Being by additions, though not as much as the adorer of Zeus and Jupiter.)

The Hermann Trilogy (1769–87) itself is carried by the ambition of making a great impression not so much on a selected few as on the widest public by covering a patriotic theme from the legendary past that addresses the cultural memory of the whole nation, becoming afterward a key part of the German 'mythology of history'.

For Herder, the lyric poetry of Gerstenberg and Klopstock is the only example of a successful adaptation of Norse mythology to the art of the present day, although he does not mention them in his essay *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie* ('On the Modern Use of Mythology'), which was published in 1767. In *Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* ('Correspondence about Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples'), inspired by both James Macpherson and Thomas Percy and published in 1773, a polemical rejection of classicist literature and regular verse construes the artistic *prosodische Runentextur* ('prosodic runic texture') (Herder 1985–2000: II, 453) of the eddic and skaldic stanzas as an instance of authentic 'nature poetry' which once used to arouse an immediate appeal (grounded in the structure of the language and in the oral or rather aural culture of the past). Here Herder not only opposes the well-measured lines and conventional stanzas, which characterize the translation of Norse poetry elaborated by Michael Denis in his *Lieder Sineds des Barden* ('Songs of Sined the Bard') (1772), but also produces his own version of *Darraðarljóð* and *Baldrs draumar* in order to come closer to the style of the Norse original; some other examples, among them *Völuspá* and a part of *Hávamál*, are included in his anthology of *Volkslieder* ('Songs of the People'), that appeared in print in 1778–79.

In a sequence of critical enquiries written in the late 1770s, Herder discusses how to recover both the lacunae in the tradition of the ancient and the discontinuities in the evolution of modern German literature. The pedagogic program of recollection, that is, of building a literary canon and finding a national identity, supposes a *nordische, deutsche Denkart* ('Nordic, German way of thinking') (Herder 1985–2000: II, 550) which once used to be common to all Germanic peoples, and postulates a continuity between past and present by equating 'Nordic' with 'German' and 'Germanic'. Turning toward the philosophy of humanity, Herder enlarges his focus of hermeneutic interest from the aesthetic to the anthropological and ethical dimension of Old Norse literature. In the two prize essays *Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker in alten und neuen Zeiten* ('On the Effect of Poetry on the Customs of Peoples in Ancient and Recent Times') and *Vom Einfluß der Regierung auf die Wissenschaften und der Wissenschaften auf die Regierung* ('On the Influence of the Government on the Sciences and the Sciences on the Government'), published in 1778–80, *rauher Heldenmuth* ('the rough valour') of heroic poetry is presented as related, not to a timeless *Ideal der Sittlichkeit* ('ideal of morality') (Herder 1985–2000: IV, 186) but to the specific climatic and historical premises of the *Zustand des Heroismus und der Freiheit* ('state of heroism and freedom') (Herder 1985–2000: IX, 2, 363), by which Herder means the Viking Age. Historicizing Eddic mythology in the fourth volume of *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* ('Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity'), which was published in 1791, Herder accentuates, on the one hand, the syncretistic texture of Old Norse cosmogony and eschatology and, on the other, the aesthetic individuality of Old Norse poetry, and endorses the philological analysis of Old Norse sources, especially with reference to *allgemeinern oder bessern Gebrauch dieser Nationalschätze* ('a more general and better use of those national treasures') (Herder 1985–2000: VI, 695).

Herder discusses the chances and challenges of such a 'better use' in the essay *Iduna oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* ('Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation'), published by Friedrich Schiller in his journal *Die Horen* in 1796. Here, the focus is centred on the poetic imagination that shapes the human mind and human culture. The axiom of the origin of *Begriffe, Ideen, Ideale* ('notions, ideas, ideals') from fictions, that is, of the formation of reason by the faculty of imagination, is performed in the poetics of the text itself, while Herder himself *imaginiert und sich sogar in fremde Situationen und Personen dichtet* ('imagines and even fantasizes himself into alien situations and persons'), weaving a dialogue in which the arguments are divided between two roles, one of an enthusiast, the other of a sceptic (Herder 1985–2000: VIII, 156–57). In four colloquies, they

consider the possibility and necessity of giving German poetry, which is lacking in imaginative power, *eine in ihrer Denkart und Sprache entsprossene Mythologie* ('a mythology originated in its native way of thinking and in its native language') (Herder 1985–2000: VIII, 156). Since that original mythology does not exist any more, it could be adopted from the Eddas, wherein *eine echte, reine deutsche Stammsprache* ('a true and pure Germanic people's language') with its *ausgebildete Fiktionen* ('fully formed fictions') has been preserved till the present day (Herder 1985–2000: VIII, 159, 164).

Connecting mythology with language, the enthusiast argues not systematically but historically and genetically, that is, not for the normativity or superiority of one or the other mythology, the Greek or the Norse, but for pluralism of cultures and for the originality and individuality of the particular tradition. On the one hand, the creative use of the mythology in the present is conditioned by the teleology of humanization and also by reflexive strategies of selection and adaptation, *unterstützt vom Verstande, geordnet von der Vernunft* ('supported by intellect and ordered by reason') (Herder 1985–2000: VIII, 157). On the other hand, the dialogue itself is determined by quite a mythopoetic dynamic of holistic persuasion which culminates in a prophetic evocation of the creative reinvention or rather palingenesis of the lost ancient literary tradition. Therefore, the program of restitution formulated in *Iduna* proposes a harmonization of analytic and synthetic practices, of philosophy and poetry, as it had already been discussed in *Vom neueren Gebrauch der Mythologie*; the more so as the two essays project a renovative effect of poetry on contemporary social life (anticipating the program of the New Mythology proclaimed in early Romanticism). The final clause of *Iduna* formulates the utopian imperative of the rejuvenation of reason by inspiration, while the enthusiast dares to pin his quasi-messianic hope for a coming genius on the sceptic: *Verschaffe uns nur den Apfel Idunens* ('Just gain for us the apple of Iduna') (Herder 1985–2000: VIII, 172).

In his final essay *Zutritt der nordischen Mythologie zur neueren Dichtkunst* ('The Entry of Nordic Mythology into Modern Poetry'), which appeared posthumously in 1804, Herder renounces the enthusiastic rhetoric of *Iduna* and strengthens his argument by showing his recognition of the earlier philological exploration of Old Norse literature, right up to Friedrich David Gräter and his anthology *Nordische Blumen* ('Nordic Flowers') (1789), which provided an annotated translation of the mythological poems from the first volume of the Arnamagnæan Edda (*Edda 1787–1828*). By doing so Herder denotes the two desiderata of scholarship and literature: the separation of the pagan from the Christian tradition based on the historical-critical method, and the 'political' use of mythology, understood as an experiment in higher literary genres, that

is, hymn and epic: *Preis unserer Gegenden, unserer Vorfahren, ihrer Taten und Lebensweise* ('praise of our countries, our forefathers, of their deeds and way of life') (Herder 1985–2000: x, 838). Reconsidering the future use of Eddic mythology, Herder once more postulates the humanization of tradition: *Aus der Edda sowohl, als dem Heldenbuch müßte nur das hervorgehen, was uns tapfrer, mäßiger, in uns selbst stärker, dem Menschengeschlecht liebenswerter und edler macht; jene rohe Wildheit bleibe älteren Zeiten* ('From the Edda and the Book of Heroes should only arise that which makes us more valiant and modest, stronger in ourselves, more likeable and nobler toward humanity; that rough savagery should remain in older times') (Herder 1985–2000: x, 839). However, concluding with a collage of quotations extracted from the long-forgotten *Gedicht eines Skalden* by Gerstenberg, Herder substantiates his ambitious forward-looking program with a backward-bending poetics of a bygone period.

In early Romanticism, the reception of the Eddas was closely related to the concept of the New Mythology, first summarized by Friedrich Hölderlin and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel in the so-called *Älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* ('Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism') (1796) and then developed especially by Friedrich Schlegel in his *Rede über die Mythologie* ('Discourse on Mythology') (1800) and by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling in his treatises on the philosophy of nature. Synthesizing reason and imagination, the 'keynotes' of the New Mythology invoked a symbolic system that was supposed to do for modern societies what ancient mythologies did for ancient cultures, namely, to create a 'midpoint' in the art and life of the community. Determined by the 'tendencies of the age', especially by the ideas of the French Revolution and German idealist philosophy, the project of the New Mythology located that 'midpoint' not in the past but in a soon-to-come future. In that way, the Romantic generation participated in a great chiliastic expectation of the turn of the age and of the renovation of the world, which was assumed to be a response to the political and ideological crises on the threshold of the nineteenth century. While the philosophical chiliasm of the Enlightenment outlined a hypothetical concept of a continuously progressing history and of the education of mankind toward humanity and reason, the poetic chiliasm of early Romanticism evoked an enthusiastic anticipation of an emerging time in which the ideal was to be fulfilled in the real here and now. Thereby, the area of the North in general became an esoteric myth (similar to the speculative phraseology of the Romantic philosophy of nature), being represented as a space of eschatology and prophecy, which lay wide open both to a universalistic ideal and a nationalistic ideology. For that reason, at the same time as Herder disqualified the myth of Ragnarök for being corrupted

by Christian ideas, the Romantic generation was mesmerized by the enigmatic syncretism of the 'twilight of the gods'.

In the fragment of the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis (1772–1801), published posthumously in 1802, the only completed part, *Die Erwartung* ('The Expectation'), culminates in the so-called *Klingsohr-Märchen* ('Klingsohr's Tale'), in which Norse and Greek mythologies are combined with Oriental symbolism as well as with Christian theosophy and eschatology, and moreover with images drawn from areas of the field of the philosophy of nature like magnetism and electricity. The midpoint of that fantastic and hermetic cosmos is a highly artificial magic world situated at the North Pole, where at last the essential faculties of the poet, embodied in an ensemble of allegorical figures, establish a new golden age and proclaim *das Reich der Ewigkeit* ('the kingdom of eternity') (Novalis 1978–87: I, 364). At the beginning of his novel fragment *Ariel's Offenbarungen* ('Ariel's Revelations'), written in 1802 and published in 1804, Achim von Arnim (1781–1831) places the lyrical drama *Das Heldenlied von Herrmann und seinen Kindern* ('The Heroic Song of Herrmann and his Children'), a phantasmagory oscillating between a universal and a national mythology. Here, the utopian turn is grounded in a tragedy: in a variation of the 'twilight of the gods' theme, a generation marked by guilt and madness — the names of the figures are taken from the Edda — is predestined to annihilate itself before the divine child Aslauga, a personification of poetry, reconciles the two enemy tribes and announces a new era of harmony (which has to be an age of German virtues as well). In a letter of 4 April 1803 to Clemens Brentano, Arnim integrates the mythology of the Edda into a prophetic vision of a transfiguration of the universe, avoiding a reference to the catastrophes of Ragnarök: the 'electrical' energy of the poetic renovation accumulated in the *heiliges Vaterland* ('holy fatherland'), *wo der Bernstein liegt* ('where amber lies', i.e. in Germany's art and science), is discharged at once into *eine Fülle des Schaffens* ('a fullness of creation') (Arnim 2000–: XXXI, 210) and into a descent of the two 'aesthetic' deities Braga and Iduna, who establish a holistic community of inspiration and an unconscious nature-like creativity. Arnim employs similar imagery in the conclusion of his dialogue essay *Erzählungen von Schauspielen* ('Reports on Dramas'), published in 1803. Here, however, aesthetics is being more clearly returned to anthropology: now the chiliastic speculation about the transfiguration of mankind is centred on the art of dance and the human body, which is predestined to ascend into a higher form of existence as being the most perfect work of art — for living and loving.

Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) displays the catastrophic dimension of Old Norse mythology and eschatology in her sympathetic adaptation of the

myth of Balder, first in a fragment of a tragedy and then in the dramatic poem *Scandinavische Weissagungen* ('Scandinavian Prophecies'), written in 1805–06 but not published until 1899 (on this see also Chapter 5.8 below). Combining a descent to the underworld and a summoning of the Völva with a didactic introduction to mythic cosmogony and genealogy, the poem synthesizes the imagery of Eddic poetry and the speculative phraseology of the Romantic philosophy of nature extracted especially from the treatises of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. But here, the antagonistic duplicity of the primal principles does not produce a universal organism, wherein the antitheses, continually potentiating themselves as well as each other, finally attain a higher unity. On the contrary, the antinomies being continually differentiated generate a strictly determined system of *Reiche des Zwistes* ('realms of quarrel') (Günderrode 1990–91: I, 347), which cannot be resolved into a *Reich der Freiheit* ('realm of freedom') as with Schiller (1988–2004: VIII, 332) or into a *Fabelreich* ('realm of fable'), as with Novalis (1978–87: I, 401). Strategies of emphatic aestheticization — with a view to compensate the sacrifice of beauty with the beauty of poetry — are consequently disavowed by a total negation of fulfilment and redemption. The nihilistic conclusion of *Weissagungen* surpasses, in its radicalism, both *Rede des toten Christus vom Weltgebäude herab, daß kein Gott sei* ('Speech of the Dead Christ down from the Universe that there is no God') by Jean Paul (1796) and *Nachtwachen* ('Nightwatches') by Bonaventura, that is, August Klingemann (1804). Compressing all the physical and mythological antinomies *in daurender Dämmerung* ('in everlasting twilight') (Günderrode 1990–91: I, 349), the final line of the poem revokes the utopian programme of universal renovation proclaimed by early Romanticism.

In late Romanticism, Old Norse mythology was securely established within the cultural horizon and the literary canon of German audiences. Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen (1812) as well as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1815) published editions of the heroic lays of the Poetic Edda, staging an intense argument about the priority of their own particular edition even before the second volume of the Arnamagnæan Edda had gone into print in 1818. Friedrich Rühs published a German translation of Snorri's *Edda* (1812) while Friedrich Majer collected his translations of some mythological poetry from both the Eddas in his *Mythologische Dichtungen und Lieder der Skandinavier* ('Mythological Poems and Lays of the Scandinavians') (1818). Then Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen started to issue his translations of Old Norse sagas in the book series *Nordische Heldenromane* ('Norse Heroic Novels') (1814–28), and Rasmus Nyerup compiled his *Wörterbuch der skandinavischen Mythologie* ('Dictionary of Scandinavian Mythology') (1816). In that way, Old Norse literature was

incorporated into the phantom presence of an original Germanic cultural tradition, which was understood to be common to both the German and the Scandinavian peoples. Patriotic sentiment, intensified and extended in the early nineteenth century in consequence of the Napoleonic occupation, misused the heroic myths of the Eddas and the enigmatic aura of the North for a reconstruction or rather recollection of national identity, participating not only in political and ideological, but also in racial reasoning, as in *Geist der Zeit* ('Spirit of the Age') by Ernst Moritz Arndt (1806/18) and in *Wachstum der Historie* ('The Growth of History') by Joseph Görres (1807), as well as in *Reden an die deutsche Nation* ('Addresses to the German Nation') by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1808).

At the same time, while the *Nibelungenlied* was coming to be regarded as the national epic poem in the German language, the emerging discipline of German(ic) philology defines the heroic lays of the Poetic Edda as one of *die ältesten und merkwürdigsten Denkmale, welche der Norden über unsern nazionalen Cyklus hat* ('the most ancient and most remarkable monuments which the North possesses with reference to our National Cycle') (von der Hagen 1812: i). That kind of patriotic criticism emphasized primarily the heroic and tragic dimension of Old Norse poetry. For the first time, the Old Norse sources of the Nibelung tradition were adapted by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué in his trilogy *Der Held des Nordens* ('The Hero of the North'), published in 1808–10 and dedicated to Fichte, that is, in a distinct context of the patriotic opposition to Napoleon; moreover, in 1818 Fouqué presented a sequence of Nordic *Heldenspiele* ('Heroic Plays'): a tragedy *Baldur der Gute* ('Baldur the Good') and a trilogy based on the Helgi lays. Hence the reference to *der humoristische Zug* ('the humoristic vein') and to the self-reflexive character of Norse mythology, *die einizige, welche durchaus mit sich selbst scherzt* ('the only one that jests with itself throughout'), placed by Goethe in the twelfth book of his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ('Poetry and Truth'), which appeared in 1814 (Goethe 1987: 1, 28, 144), might be not only a remembrance of social life in Wetzlar forty years earlier, but also an ironic pointer to the contemporary worship of the North.

Disappointed by prophecies of idealistic philosophy and aesthetic religion as well as by promises of national deliverance, the post-Romantic generation created its own pessimistic and nihilistic mythology. In his poem *Götterdämmerung* ('Twilight of the Gods'), published in 1822, Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) represented a nature without myth and a community without mythology, with mythological signification and the mythical imagination being displaced into the inner space of the lyric subject. Here a horror vision reverses the conventional literary mythomachy, in which Nordic or Slavic paganism is overcome by Christian religion (as it takes place in dramas by Zacharias

Werner, Clemens Brentano, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, August Klingemann and others), while the suppressed mythology of the Edda rises up against the elevated mythology of the Bible, and the beautiful inauthenticity of spiritual images and phrases cannot resist the chthonic immediacy and monstrous materiality of destructive desires and forces. In a similar way, but in a different sense, Heine contraposes his sensualist conception of erotic and aesthetic emancipation, which is related to Utopian socialism, and *die dämonischen Kräfte des altgermansichen Pantheismus* ('the demonic forces of the old Germanic pantheism') (Heine 1973–97: VIII. 1, 118) in his essay *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* ('On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany') published in 1835. The final passage of the essay, in particular, represents the figure of *Thor mit dem Riesenhammer* ('Thor with the giant-hammer') (Heine 1973–97: VIII.1, 118) as an allegory of political revolution inspired by German idealist philosophy and 'national memory', interpreted as a phenomenon of atavistic regression and barbarous destruction.

The emphasis of the imagery changes once more in the reportage of *Lutezia* (1840–43), wherein Heine undertook to retain the historical and political constellation of the July Monarchy. Here, the proletarian eschatology of the coming revolution oscillated between *das Geheul des Wolfes Fenris, der das Reich der Hela verkündet* ('the howl of the wolf Fenrir proclaiming the kingdom of Hela') (Heine 1973–97: XIII.1, 34) and *ein Gerassel* [...]*, wie von goldenen Ketten, und dann ein verzweifelndes Schluchzen* ('the rattle [...] as of golden chains, and then a despairing sob') of the bound Messiah (Heine 1973–97: XI, 111). In that way, Heine construes the endgame of the philosophy of history, in which the not-yet-unbound proletariat will be transformed from monster to saviour, as an infinite delay of a chiliastic promise. In the poem *Valkyren* ('Valkyries') related to the tradition of *Darraðarljóð* and completed in 1847, the only function of the myth is to pass a comment on history, whose structure is represented not in a line of perfectibility and emancipation, but in a circle of cyclicity, which is determined solely by the will to power. Here, the stanzas sung by the three Valkyries no longer relate to any kind of mythical transcendence. The metaphysical antagonism of Good and Evil is reduced to an accidental difference of 'better' and 'worse'. Legitimation and representation of authority become an eternal recurrence of 'signifying nothing', wherein every mythological image and every allegorical symbol is meant to refer to another and to itself. But yet, only a few years later, Richard Wagner was about to melt and cast all the fragmented images and retired figures of antiquated mythologies into a new myth of modernity in his *Ring des Nibelungen*.

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5.2 – Ewald's and Oehlenschläger's Poetry Inspired by Old Norse Myth

Lise Præstgaard Andersen
Translated from the Danish by Margaret Clunies Ross

Johannes Ewald (1743–81) and Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) are the most important representatives of pre-Romanticism and High Romanticism respectively in Danish literature. In that capacity they are also responsible for the recurrence of interest in Scandinavian antiquity, including the Old Norse legacy, in Danish imaginative literature before and after 1800. However, in the latter sphere Oehlenschläger is joined by the slightly younger N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), and the folk high school movement he inspired (see further on this, Volume II, Chapter 1.1).

Ewald used his knowledge of Old Norse literature in his rebellion against French-inspired classicism and employed Nordic subject matter to portray conflict-filled disharmony and passions that transcend boundaries. Oehlenschläger, however, was first and foremost a seeker after harmony, even though he revealed a fondness for displays of strength and an inclination towards exploits that contrast with common bourgeois morality, especially in the poetry of his youth.

Ewald's sources were mainly Saxo Grammaticus in Vedel's translation from 1575 and, to a lesser extent, Snorri's *Edda*. The play *Rolf Krage* (written in 1770 and published in 1771) is based entirely on Saxo and his paraphrase of

Lise Præstgaard Andersen is Lektor Emeritus in Scandinavian Literature at the University of Southern Denmark, Odense. Her research interests are in Old Norse literature, Danish ballads and the Scandinavian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her publications include *Skjoldmøer — en kvindemyte* (1982), *Partalopa saga* (ed., 1983) and *Sorte Damer-Studier i femme fatale-motivet i dansk digtning fra romantik til århundredskifte* (1990). She is the chief editor of *Nordica* (1984–), a journal for Scandinavian literature.

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Bjarkamál, and Ewald's breakthrough work within the dramatic genre, the ballad opera (*syngespil*) *Balders Død* (written 1773, published 1775, performed for the first time without music in 1778 and performed again with music by Johan Hartmann in 1779), was mainly based on Saxo's representation of the love triangle between Hother, king of Lejre, Nanna and the god Balder. However, Loki, borrowed from Snorri's *Edda* in the character of a schemer, managed to sneak into the drama.

Oehlenschläger, however, was in the position of being able to read some Old Norse for himself, even though he preferred to use parallel translations. In this respect he contrasted with Ewald, who was obliged to use Danish or Latin translations exclusively. For this reason, among others, Oehlenschläger's foundation in the sources was broader than Ewald's, and he used both the Poetic Edda and Snorri's *Edda*, *Heimskringla* and *fornaldarsögur* as source material. Examples of this usage (with the sources in parentheses) are the famous romances (ballads) from Oehlenschläger's ground-breaking work of High Romanticism *Digte*, 'Poems', 1803: *Guldhornene*, 'The Golden Horns' (The Poetic Edda); *Hákon Jarls død*, 'The Death of Jarl Hákon' (*Heimskringla*); the closet drama *Baldurs Død*, 'Balder's Death', from *Nordiske Digte*, 'Nordic Poems', 1807 (The Poetic Edda); the romance cycle *Nordens Guder*, 'The Gods of Scandinavia', 1819 (both The Poetic Edda and Snorri's *Edda*); and *Helge*, 'Helgi', 1814, likewise a romance cycle and one of Oehlenschläger's most successful works (*Hrólfs saga kraka*).[1]

The greatest number of Oehlenschläger's wide-ranging literary works are built on the foundation of ancient and medieval literature, both Old Norse-Icelandic and Danish. The sagas of Icelanders, much admired in later times, were a source of inspiration for Oehlenschläger only once, in the tragedy *Kiartan og Gudrun* ('Kiartan and Gudrun') (1848), that paraphrases *Laxdœla saga*, which was published in an Arnagmagnæan edition in 1826. This edition, as usual, was accompanied by a Latin translation. At the same time, it has commonly been supposed that Oehlenschläger was inspired in this connection by the great saga translation into Danish by N. M. Petersen, *Historiske Fortællinger om Islændernes Færd hjemme og ude* ('Historical Tales of the Icelanders' Journeys at Home and Abroad') in four volumes (1839–44).

Ewald narrates quite clearly in his memoirs, *Levned og Meeninger* ('Life and Opinions') (written 1747–78, incomplete edition 1804–08, first collected edition 1855), that, during his schooldays in the town of Slesvig, at that time in

[1] The term *romancekredsen* ('romance cycle') is commonly used in discussions of Danish Romantic literature to refer to short romances, often in different verse-forms, or ballads, which together form a longer narrative poem.

Danish hands, he discovered and devoured 'the Icelandic sagas' in the headmaster's library along with other literature of adventure (*eventyrlig litteratur*). The term 'the Icelandic sagas' cannot refer here to the sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*), since the first edition of them did not appear until the publication of *Njáls saga* in 1772, an Arnamagnæan edition with Icelandic text and Latin translation. Probably Ewald was referring to *fornaldarsögur*. In any case the general situation was that an interest in sagas of Icelanders began later in Denmark, both with regard to the practice of editing and their reuse in imaginative literature, than the interest in eddic and skaldic poetry, kings' sagas and *fornaldarsögur*. Originally people were interested in Nordic sources as the bearers of knowledge about common Nordic material, including heathen religion and heathen heroes, and, not unexpectedly, historical stories about the forefathers of contemporary Danish kings.

Both Ewald and Oehlenschläger were children of a somewhat greater Denmark than the Denmark of today. To the south, Denmark's borders reached to the River Elbe and included South Slesvig and Holsten (Schleswig-Holstein, today a German federal state), together with Norway, which was ceded to Sweden in 1814, as a consequence of Denmark's unfortunate participation on Napoleon's side in the Napoleonic Wars. These circumstances brought with them greater influences upon Danish literature from German culture and literature than subsequently. It was also considered self-evident at that time that Norway's history was a part of the history of the Danish kingdom, something that manifests itself particularly in Oehlenschläger's Nordic-inspired poetry from the period before 1814.

With regard to German influence, Ewald was a member of the circle around the German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803), who lived in Copenhagen between 1751 and 1771 with support from the Danish court, summoned there by the German-born foreign minister J. H. E. Bernstorff. With his passionate odes (*Frühlingsfeier*, 'Celebration of Spring' 1759; *Oden*, 1771) Klopstock influenced Ewald's passionate, religious and subjective poetry and likewise inspired him to work up subjects from national history with his drama *Hermans Schlacht* (1769), on the subject of Arminius's (Hermann's) victory over Augustus's Roman legions in the Teutoburger forest in 9 AD. Equally as important for Ewald's choice of Nordic subjects was, however, the German-speaking Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737–1823), who also belonged to the Klopstock circle (on Klopstock and Gerstenberg, see also Chapter 5.1). He was born in Tønder (today one of Denmark's most southerly towns in present-day Sønderjylland or Nordslesvig), the son of an immigrant German officer in the Danish service, and he lived in Copenhagen between

1765 and 1771. He was among the first pre-Romantics to take note of Nordic antiquity as a literary treasure store with his *Gedicht eines Skalden* ('Poem of a Skald') (1766) and, later, with his *Briefe über Merkwurdigheiten der Literatur* ('Letters on Curiosities of Literature'), also called *Schleswiger Literaturbriefe* ('Slesvig Literary Letters') (1766–67). In these he called attention to a series of works that he considered especially 'Norse', namely, James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760), Thomas Percy's edition of ancient English ballads (*Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765), the works of Shakespeare, Danish ballads, which he understood as translated from ancient poetry (*oldtidskvad*) and *Bjarkamál*. Gerstenberg was a personal friend of Johannes Ewald, who acknowledged him as a source of inspiration.

The early part of the Age of Enlightenment did not greatly appreciate Nordic mythology and Nordic antiquity and preferred rule-bound French tragedies and their background in classical mythology. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a new literary departure when Nordic themes entered imaginative writing, but the interest in Scandinavian antiquity had already been cultivated in a learned context during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, beginning with Ole Worm's work on runes (*Runir*, 1636) and continued in Thomas Bartholin's work on the Danes' contempt for death, *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus libri tres* ('Three Books on Danish Antiquity and the Reasons for the Danes' Contempt of Death', 1689) (see further Chapter 3.1 above).

Oehlenschläger's relationship with the German tradition was awoken in 1802 through the philosophical lectures of Heinrich Steffens (1773–1845). They aroused in him an enthusiasm for a holistic, universal Romantic understanding of life, involving an organic and spiritual connection between nature, history and humanity, including the genius of poetry. Steffens, whose father was German, had just returned from a two-year stay in Germany, where he had associated with the German Romantics from the Jena circle (Fichte, Schelling, the two Schlegel brothers and Novalis), and he now brought their message to Denmark in an enthusiastic and inspiring manner. One of the most famous episodes in the history of Danish literature took place after this: the two young men plunged into a sixteen-hour long conversation about the gospel of Romanticism in the course of an extensive walk through Frederiksberg and Copenhagen, after which Oehlenschläger went home and wrote his breakthrough poem *Guldhornene* ('The Golden Horns'), which was later inserted into *Digte* 1803 (published in 1802, with 1803 on the title page). In Edda-inspired stanzas the story of the discovery of the two famous gold horns from antiquity (*c.* 400) in Gallehus, South Jutland, is related, followed by an account

of their subsequent theft from the chamber of curiosities (*kunstkammeret*) in which they were kept. The old Nordic gods appear as actors and controlling characters in a world drama and Nordic antiquity is described in the following way: *Da det straalte i Norden, da Himlen var paa Jorden* ('When [light] shone in the North, when Heaven was on Earth') (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 20). However, the Old Nordic character of Oehlenschläger's production was not inspired by a Romantic understanding of history alone but also by his predecessor, Johannes Ewald, as he wrote in his *Erindringer* ('Recollections'): *I Ewalds Rolf Krage aabnede den nordiske Saga første Gang sine Gravhöie for mig* ('In Ewald's *Rolf Krage* the Nordic saga first opened its grave-mound to me') (Oehlenschager 1850–51: I, 32). And further, he reveals in the Preface to *Nordiske Digte*: *I min Barndom var Evalds Balders Død det egentlig første Digt, som fra Formens Side gjorde Indtryk paa mig. Dette Sørgespil og Rolf Krage vakte de første Funker af nordisk Digterild i mit Hierte* ('In my childhood Evald's *Balders Død* was really the first poem that made an impression on me from the point of view of form. That tragedy and *Rolf Krage* aroused the first sparks of Nordic poetic fire in my heart') (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: III, 9).

Johannes Ewald's Nordic Dramas

***Rolf Krage* (1771)**

Rolf Krage (1771) is written in prose — in contrast to contemporary classical tragedies composed in alexandrines — and the classical unity of the plot is completely disregarded. Ewald bases his own fondness for *Rolf Krage* on a perception of the play as a representative transition from Corneille to Shakespeare and to Klopstock's *Messias*, revealed in a planned but never published preface to the reprint in *Samtlige Skrifter* ('Collected Writings') (1780–91; see Lundgreen-Nielsen 1969). The plot plays out around Rolf Krage's death and his men's brave defence of him under attack from his half-sister Skulde and her husband Hiartvar. The main theme is his retinue's loyalty towards the king and their consequent joint contempt for death, expressed through the motif of laughing on the point of death. A second theme is regard for fame after death. The source is *Bjarkamál* in Anders Sørensen Vedel's prose paraphrase in his Saxo-translation from 1575. The play was understood both by contemporaries and later audiences to promote an authentic Old Norse or Old Danish spirit and morality. A subsidiary motif was introduced, however, which borrowed from classical French drama's well-known conflict between duty and desire. This centres round the figure of Hother, who has actually come to Rolf's royal

court in Lejre, according to ancient Nordic custom, in order to take vengeance for his father and kill Rolf, but now retreats from his duty of vengeance as he is disgusted by Hiartvar's and Skulde's cowardly nocturnal assault. It could be argued that Hother wants to substitute a newer age's humanity for an old, fossilized norm (Doctor 1976: 24–29).

Balders Død (1773)

This drama, or more accurately ballad opera (*syngespil*), is Ewald's greatest achievement in the Nordic genre, and it was long remembered in Danish literature (on its staging, see Chapter 6.1 below). Karen Blixen uses Ewald's Balder figure, and the circumstance that the Nordic gods are apparently set to replace the Greek gods in literature, as an expression of a young man's fascination with bourgeois ideals of equality at the end of the eighteenth century and a further expression of the connected belief in the law of feelings in opposition to fossilized social institutions, including the wealth of the nobility ('Sorg-Agre', *Vintereventyr*, 1942). Blixen's contemporary Martin A. Hansen has his interesting and ambiguous protagonist Johannes Vig from the novel *Løgneren* ('The Liar') (1950), one of the most successful novels in Danish literature, write himself into the love triangle from *Balders Død*, because he identifies himself as the semi-divine Balder and his rival with the obviously boring Hother, king of Lejre.

Once again Ewald found his source material in Saxo. Only the scheming Loki-figure comes from Snorri's *Edda*. But Ewald's Balder dies in a quite different way from what happens in Snorri's narrative, because in Ewald's play it is his own uncontrollable passion, which is admirable in itself, that impels him to death. Nanna actually loves Hother, to whom she is betrothed, but Balder neither can nor wants to accept this fact, even though many things point to it. His own tempestuous feelings are not changed in any way on this account. The play is thus a pre-Romantic work about passion that transcends boundaries and its collision with the barriers reality sets up, just like the young Goethe's *Werther* (1774), though it was written earlier. Both works are thus expressions of the same tendency towards the end of the eighteenth century: belief in the right of the swelling heart over reason and social norms.

The play observes the demand of French tragedy for the unities of time, place and action. It takes place over a period of twenty-four hours, and in fact the sunrise, which occurs at the end, plays a fatal role, because it has been prophesied that if Balder had not either abandoned his irrational love or abducted Nanna, he was fated to die before sunrise. However, Hother (the same figure whom we know from *Rolf Krage*) experiences a different dilemma. He has sworn

that either he himself or Balder must die before day's end, but in a duel, where Balder actually gets the upper hand, he spares Hother — for Nanna's sake. And so Hother now has difficulty in killing his noble rescuer. Balder is possessed by love and obeys no other law. The conflicts are solved by Balder trying to snatch Nanna away by force, in spite of Hother's presence, but he stumbles and suffers a deadly wound from Hother's spear. The play thus deals with insoluble conflicts and impossible situations of choice, but its primary theme is the great passion that defies all reasonableness: *Endog forkastet skal jeg elske Nanna* ('Even rejected I will [still] love Nanna') Balder bursts out (Brix *et al.* 1914–24: III, 74). And that is not all. The unrequited passion is certainly painful, but it also makes Balder feel he is intensely alive. Thus he can turn down Thor's matter-of-fact attempt to get him to give up the girl, and the same adviser's appeal to his divine dignity does not help in the least, because *Jeg brænder, Thor, og gruer for den Tanke | At see den Flamme slukt, hvoraf jeg martres* ('I burn, Thor, and dread the thought | Of seeing that flame extinguished, by which I am tormented') (Brix *et al.* 1914–24: III, 55).

Adam Oehlenschläger and Old Norse Sources: Three Characteristics

Oehlenschläger's interpretation of the Old Norse world shows the following characteristics, which will be discussed in greater detail below:

1. He tries to create a coherent whole out of its fragmentary character.
2. He rewrites the Old Norse (prose) style's often laconic statements as grandiose and graphic word pictures or images.
3. He supplies the female characters, in particular, with an erotic and bodily sensuality, which is not present in the sources, but he adopts a rather hesitant approach to the independent and energetic Nordic women, like shield-maidens and valkyries, whom he feels himself compelled to reinterpret.

Oehlenschläger was stimulated by the fragmentary character of the Nordic tradition, because it actually provided a wealth of good stories and aesthetic possibilities that were productive for an artist to tackle (Liebenberg 1868: I, 302): *I den nordiske Mythologi finde vi derimod* (*i modsætning til den græske*) *endnu det udannede Stof, som kun venter paa en Kunstnerhaand for at dannes* ('In Norse mythology, on the other hand, we find (in contrast to the Greek) still unformed material, which only awaits an artist's hand to be shaped'). He wrote this in his prize essay of 1801 (Liebenberg 1868: I, 293–312) on the possible use of Norse

mythology in literature. Therefore, in his recreations Oehlenschläger strove to bring out connections, as he expressed it in his Preface to *Nordiske Digte* of 1807:

> Med Tiden blev det mig ikke nok at kiende den [dvs. den nordiske oldtids historie og mytologi] tilfulde, jeg vilde erkiende den, forstaae den. Man sagde mig: det var et Virvar uden Mening; mig kom det altid mere for, som en Mening, hvori der med Tiden var kommet Virvar. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: III, 10)
>
> (In time it was not enough for me to know it [that is, Nordic antiquity's history and mythology] fully, but I wanted to perceive it, understand it. People said to me that it was a shambles without meaning; it seemed to me more like a meaning in which a shambles had been produced as time went on.)

In this last-named publication another aim was that the individual works should complement one another. *Nordiske Digte* consists of (1) the epic *Thors rejse til Jotunheim* ('Thor's Journey to Giantland') (its source being Snorri's *Edda*), begun in 1803 and extended to the romance cycle *Nordens Guder* in 1819; (2) the play *Balder hin Gode* ('Baldr the Good'), in which a rather passive Balder feels himself weighed down throughout with forebodings of his own death and is certainly not involved in any dramatic love story like the Balder in his predecessor Ewald's play (the source here is Snorri's *Edda*, not Saxo); and (3) the drama *Hakon Jarl hin Rige* ('Jarl Hákon the Powerful') (the source being *Heimskringla*). According to the author the meaning is that the three works should not only complement one another in terms of genre, but that they should also do so thematically, in such a way as to illustrate a development in heathendom over time: first, a confident high point in the description of the simple-minded Thor; then the announcement of the loss at Balder's death, where the gods begin to prepare themselves for Ragnarök; and finally *Hakon Jarl hin rige*, which demonstrates Christianity's victory over heathendom, whereby Óláfr Tryggvason overcomes heathendom's last great representative.

Oehlenschläger's reworking of the Old Norse sources shows yet another striking characteristic. As mentioned, he paraphrases Old Norse taciturnity as magnificent, sensuous and dynamic verse. This can be exemplified by a comparison between the original sibyl's prophecy from *Völuspá* in the Poetic Edda and Oehlenschläger's representation of the gods' repeated meetings in *Guldhornene* (*Digte* 1803):

> Þá gengu regin öll
> á rökstóla,
> ginnheilög goð,
> ok um þat gættusk.

Da ginge Guder.
Alle til Raadstol′
De evig hellig′
Derom raadsloge.[2]

Skyen suser,
Natten bruser,
Gravhøien sukker,
Rosen sig lukker.
De øvre Regioner
Toner!
De sig møde, de sig møde,
De forklarede Høie,
Kampfarvede, røde,
Med Stierneglans i Øie. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 20)

(Night hurries
In cloudy flurries;
Tumuli waken,
The rose is shaken,
A voice through the skies
Profoundly sighs.
Over the storms
The gods arise,
War-crimsoned forms,
Star-flashing eyes.) (Hillyer 1922: 15)

Nordens Guder *(1819, begun 1805): Sensual Women*

In *Nordens Guder* (1819), whose sources were both the Poetic Edda and Snorri's *Edda*, Oehlenschläger uses the story of Freyr's infatuation with the giantess Gerd (Gerðr) as the pivotal point of the gods' route towards Ragnarök. The episode is understood as a kind of Fall. In his youthful dissertation on the advantages of using Norse mythology in modern literature, Oehlenchläger thought, in spite of his enthusiasm for Old Norse, that there was also some-

[2] This is Sandvig's Old Norse text and Danish translation (used by Oehlenschläger) in *Forsøg til en Oversættelse af Sæmunds Edda* ('Attempt at a Translation of Sæmund's Edda' (1783–85), cited from Billeskov Jansen (1958: 19). An English translation of the Old Norse text is 'Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate | the sacrosanct gods, and considered this' (Larrington 2014: 4).

thing missing here: a tender erotic gentleness. However, the young author was very confident that he could make good the lack with his own portrayals, without describing anything that was completely foreign to the old inhabitants of the North. For Oehlenschläger the erotic was all about sensuality and the body, and he seasoned his versions of mythological narratives with sketches of women in a state of greater or lesser undress. This appears also from a comparison between the source, the eddic poem *Skírnismál*, and the episode in *Nordens Guder* in which Freyr spies on the graceful and undressed Gerd. In the introductory prose to *Skírnismál*, it is said that 'Freyr the son of Niord, had seated himself in Hlidskialf and looked over all the worlds. He looked into Giant-land and saw there a beautiful girl, as she was walking from her father's hall to an outbuilding. From that he derived great sickness of heart.'[3]

Oehlenschläger expresses the scene as follows:

> Men som nu bedst han stirred, han saa et Under sødt:
> Thi hvidt blev det Røde, det Hvide blev rødt:
> Naar Kirsebærret brister, det vise maa sin Steen,
> Og Læben viste Tænderne som dreiet Elfenbeen
>
> Og ved den stærke Svulmen, fra Barmens hvide Hud
> Livstykket gled tilside, sprang Rosenknuppen ud;
> Da vaagned hun og skiulte med Haandens bløde Blad,
> Hvad Fingeren forraadte som skilte sig ad.[4]
>
> (But while he gazed, his longing eyes witness'd a wondrous sight!
> For now to white the red was changed! and red became the white!
> When cherries burst, they show their stone; when her lips part, behold
> Two rows of teeth, as bright as pearls or ivory, they unfold!
>
> And when the tunic fell aside with the pulsation strong,
> Up from the lovely damsel's breast a pair of rose-buds sprung!
> Then she awoke, and with her hand those treasures sought to veil;
> But strict their duty to fulfil the parted fingers fail.) (Frye 1845: 197)

Another sensual element in *Nordens Guder* is the description of the goddesses' bathing in a forest lake. Here Loki appears as a Peeping Tom who is specially

[3] Translation of Larrington (2014: 57). *Freyr, sonr Niarðar, hafði sezc í Hliðsciálf ok sá um heima alla. Hann sá í Iötunheima, oc sá þar mey fagra, þá er hon gecc frá scála föður síns til skemmo. Þar af fecc hann hugsóttir miclar* (*NK* 69).

[4] *Freiers Elskov* ('Freyr´s Love'), from *Nordens Guder* (Ingerslev-Jensen 1976: 204–05).

attracted by Thor's wife, the large, lovely and quite uncoquettish Sif, who certainly lacks Freyja's sexy come-hither expression but has other graces:

> De brede Skuldre, melkehvide,
> De fulde Arme, til at stride
> Og til at kryste elsksovshede
> Til Kamp og Glæde lige rede.
>
> (Her shoulders broad so milky white.
> Her juicy, plump, and well-turn'd arms
> Are fit for love's or war's alarms,)
>
> [...]
>
> Fast staaer hun paa de skiønne Fødder
> Og langt og glansfuldt har hun Haaret
> Til Hælen i en Fletning baaret.[5]
>
> (On well-turn'd feet her tow'ring height
> Securely stands; her hair loose streaming
> Down to her feet descends, with golden radiance gleaming.)
>
> (Frye 1845: 125–26)

Oehlenschläger may have learnt the technique of interweaving daring descriptions of female nudity with Old Norse material from Saxo, who enlivens his somewhat monotonous lists of kings and descriptions of battles with snapshots of naked girls viewed from the perspective of a voyeur, as when Balder spies on Nanna in her bath at the beginning of the third book of the *Gesta Danorum* (*Saxo* 2015: I, iii, 2.3, pp. 144–45).

A final example from *Nordens Guder* illustrates how uneasy Oehlenschläger could become when he found female characters in his sources who involved themselves in men's activities. A case in point is that of Röskva, the girl who accompanied Thor on his journey to Útgarða-Loki together with her brother Thjalfi. After their return the strong god busied himself greatly sending her to where, according to his way of thinking, she belonged:

> Til Freyas Fruersæde
> Jeg nu dig bringe vil.
> Det vil dig bedre glæde
> End mandigt Heltespil.

[5] *Loke fatter Elskov til Sif* ('Loki Falls in Love with Sif'), *Nordens Guder* (Ingerslev-Jensen 1976: 144).

Der kan du Elskov dyrke!
Jeg har alt længst erkiendt,
At med din Heltestyrke
Det er kun slet bevendt.[6]

(I'll lead thee strait to Freya's grove,
Where every female loves to dwell:
Better wilt thou in sports of love,
Than in the toils of war excel.) (Frye 1845: 101)

In general Oehlenschläger had difficulty in accepting the independent female characters of Old Norse literature. According to the basis of his Romantic understanding, the two sexes were polar opposites. His difficulties were greatest, naturally, when he encountered armed women, valkyries or shield-maidens, in the sources. In this respect Oehlenschläger contrasts with Ewald, who took these figures seriously, including the valkyries in *Balders død* and the timid girl Signe, who is transformed into a heroine in *Rolf Krage* (cf. Præstgaard Andersen 1981, 1982).

Helge *(1814): A* femme fatale *and a Shield-Maiden*

The romance cycle *Helge* (1814) is one of Oehlenschläger's most successful works. Its source is the *fornaldarsaga Hrólfs saga kraka*, and Oehlenschläger had read it in Swedish translation in Björner's *Nordiska Kämpa Dater* (1773). He testifies himself to his relationship with his source in the original exemplar of the book, now in the Frederiksborg Museum. The fact that it was the saga that was the source and not Saxo's account of the descendants of the Skjoldungs is obvious, because, in contrast to both the saga and Oehlenschläger, Saxo lacks the charming narrative about the trick the brave boys, Helge and Hroar, played on their father's murderer, the usurper Frode.

By and large Oehlenschläger follows the saga in its external plot, even though he reverses two of Helge's love stories. They concern the meeting with a shield-maiden, Queen Oluf of Saxland, who does not want to have dealings with any man, but whom, in the saga, Helge brutally rapes, probably with the laconic narrator's approval, and the subsequent meeting with a so-called *álfkona* ('elf-woman'). This supernatural woman is very different from ill-fated and alluring women like the Danish elf-maidens of the popular ballads, even though the first elements of the words *álfkona* and *elverpige* are etymologically

[6] *Hiemreisen* ('The Journey Home'), *Nordens Guder* (Ingerslev-Jensen 1976: 117).

related. The problems in the saga begin for Helge when he breaks a pledge to the *álfkona* to take care of their common offspring. The rejected child is identical with Skuld, who will later cause the destruction of the Skjoldung lineage through her nightly assault on her half-brother Hrolf. The result of the relationship with Oluf is the birth of a daughter, Yrsa, something Helge is unaware of, and as a consequence, he ends up marrying his own daughter.

Oehlenschläger's reversal of the two love stories results in the hero's fall being caused indirectly by his irascible temperament and his impulsive sexuality, even though these qualities in themselves are also regarded and described as quite charming. In Oehlenschläger's romance cycle Helge does not let down his daughter Skuld. On the contrary, his heart is stirred with paternal pleasure when he sees her for the first time. However, as it appears later, she has inherited her mother, Tankiær's, demonic allure as well as her capricious temperament. For Oehlenschläger the *álfkona* of the saga is interpreted in accordance with Romanticism's taste for dangerous and seductive mermaids. She first seduces Helge in a famous scene in a bathing hut, then she leaves him, transformed into a snake and thus indirectly revealing her malicious nature. Finally, she sends him into the arms of the proud Oluf, knowing that he will be rejected one more time. Helge humiliates Oluf after a lovers' quarrel. Each of the two women broods over her motive for revenge, as Tangkiær wants to avenge Helge's slaying of her lover Frode. Consequently they conspire together to punish Helge. Without his being aware of its consequences, Helge's relationship with Oluf has led to the birth of a daughter. Thus Tankiær (the mermaid) and Oluf (the shield-maiden) later on lure him into marrying his own daughter with Oluf, named Yrsa, who has grown into a fair young maiden. The conclusion of this romance cycle thus approaches a Nordic Oedipus-tragedy through its variation on the incest-motif.

Tangkiær has made Helge believe that the shield-maiden Oluf's opposition to men and marriage is only a pretence:

> Og agt du ei hendes høie Mod
> Af Emblas Blod
> Er hun saavel som en anden.
> Den vildeste Qvinde med Stang og med Sværd
> Erkiænder tilsidst i den kiærlige Færd,
> At hun bør adlyde Manden.[7]

[7] *En Fugl siunger for Kongen* ('A Bird Sings for the King'), *Helge* (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: v, 55).

> (And if you do not take notice of her lofty temperament, she is just like anyone else of Embla's blood. The wildest woman with staff and sword realizes in the end that she ought to obey the man in the dealings of love.)

However, Oluf arranges a regular duel with her suitor but appears here as almost a figure of fun or of pathos. Helge easily overpowers her and throws her to the ground (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: v, 60).

Oehlenschläger shares his scepticism about the shield-maiden motif with Saxo, but not with the older Norse sources like the Poetic Edda's Sigrún in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* and Brynhildr in the cycle involving Sigurðr. At the same time the figures of shield-maidens in the younger sources, like the so-called *riddarasögur* ('sagas of knights'), were very much in accordance with Oehlenschläger's understanding. In these sagas, which were hardly known to the Romantic world, the heroic independent woman, here called a *meykongr* ('maiden queen'), is transformed into a haughty princess, who turns down her suitors only to be later overcome by one of them and brought to love him. This folk-tale motif (AT 900 *König Drosselbart*, 'King Thrushbeard') was, however, known to the Romantics from various folk-tales. Yet the story, in Oehlenschläger's version, has no happy ending. Oluf does not end by loving Helge but by hating him and thus plotting against him.

A Retrospective Look at Oehlenschläger's Juvenilia

Oehlenschläger's enthusiasm for Nordic antiquity continued and to a certain extent increased during his career as a writer. In part from the beginning Romanticism viewed the prehistoric period as *den straalende Top*, | *hvorfra vi er siunken og atter skal op* ('the brilliant peak from which we have sunk and shall rise again') (*Sanct Hansaften-Spil*, *Digte* 1803; Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: i, 274); in part the originally all-embracing and profound philosophical Romanticism evolved into a more constrained national Romanticism, in which the cultivation of the prehistory of the individual European countries legitimated a belief in one's own country's importance as a reaction against the chaos of the Napoleonic wars. With *Nordiske Digte* (1807), Oehlenschläger relinquished his ambition to interpret the whole of Romantic philosophy and concentrated for the future on Nordic or national Romantic themes. A similar reversal took place almost simultaneously in Germany from the so-called *Jenaromantik* to the so-called *Heidelbergromantik*. In both countries it was not only a matter of a reduction in subject matter but also a movement in a more conservative and traditional direction.

In Oehlenschläger's youthful poetry, especially in *Digte* 1803, there are traces of a greater philosophical depth, in part a boldness, such that the poet values heathendom of the prehistoric age almost more than present-day Christianity. This is the case in the romance *Hakon Jarls død*, for which the source is *Heimskringla*, where sympathy for the old days is clear. Óláfr Tryggvason (Olaf Tryggesøn), the man of good fortune, arrives in Norway with surprising suddenness and irresistible rightness, which he derives both from fate and history, in order to bring the message of Christianity:

> Olaf Tryggesøn lander i Norge.
> Brat synger han Messer paa hviden Strand!
> Fra skumle, sydlige Borge
> Bringer han Munke til Klippeland.
> Alt mere den christne Troe sig udbreder;
> Men mægtige Hakon Bønderne leder.
> For gamle Troe
> I Fædreboe
> De møder Olaf med tapper Ære —
> Men Konningen splitter de samlede Hære!
> (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 6–7)

> (Olaf Tryggvason lands with his vassals.
> They sing the mass on Norway's strand;
> From gloomy southern castles
> He brings his monks to the mountain land.
> The Christian faith invades the region,
> But Hakon leads his peasant legion
> To fight and bleed
> For the old creed.
> They meet the King, but the ancient faith
> Goes down in the sunset flame of death.) (Hillyer 1922: 22)

And the narrator finally and with sadness is able to note that *i stedet for Lundens ærværdige Minder | Man idel Kirker og Klostre finder* ('in place of the grove's venerable memories one finds nothing but churches and monasteries') (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 9).

Guldhornene, like *Hakon Jarls Død*, is a romance or a ballad, that is, a fairly long epic-lyric dramatic poem. The epic component concerns the discovery of the finds of the two famous golden horns from Gallehus in Southern Jutland in 1639 and 1734 respectively and their subsequent theft in 1802 from the chamber of curiosities (*kunstkammer*), where they were kept. The poem unites prehistory and contemporary history by letting the old Nordic gods

become responsible for the plan behind this incident. The refrain that gets the gods to meet twice to take counsel about the world's fate is borrowed from *Völuspá* ('The Sibyl's Prophecy'). From Romanticism arises the idea that there is a mythic connection between history, nature, the intuitive human and the human genius. That is in accordance with the actual facts in this case that a young peasant girl and a peasant ploughman found the two horns almost by accident close together but about a hundred years apart. To the Romantic poet, this fact indicates that simple people are in contact with the gods or the forces of nature. And all nature joins in each time:

> Da standser Ploven,
> Og en gysen farer
> Igennem Skoven,
> Fugleskarer
> Pludselig tier,
> Hellig Tavshed
> Alt indvier. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 24)

> (Abruptly the plough
> Stops, and there rush
> Shudders of wonder
> Through every bough.
> The clouds sunder,
> Bird-notes cease,
> All voices fall
> In a holy hush.
> Profound peace
> Consecrates all.) (Hillyer 1922: 20)

The gods, however, have surrendered to the human race this glimpse from the days of antiquity for the benefit of the few chosen humans who really chart and experience the spirit in nature and history and who yearn for a revelation of the divine. They are portrayed in the following way:

> For de sieldne Faae
> Som vor Gave forstaae,
> Som ei Jordlænker binde,
> Men hvis Siele sig hæve
> Til det Eviges Tinde,
> Som ane det Høie
> I Naturens Øie,
> Som tilbedende bæve
> For Guddommens Straaler,

I Sole, i Violer,
I det Mindste, i det Største,
Som brændende tørste
Efter Livets Liv,
Som — o, store Aand
For de svundne Tider!
See dit Guddomsblik
Paa Helligdommens Sider,
For *dem* lyder atter vort Bliv. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 23)

(The few who know
The gift we bestow,
Who never surrender
To earthly bond;
Who scale the splendour
Of eternity,
And through Nature see
The light beyond,
Who trembling divine

God's fires that shine
In flowers, in suns,
In west, in east,
In greatest, in least;
Whose thirst burns
For the Life of life;
Who — O Great Spirit
Of the vanished days! —
Who see the rays

In radiance, rife
On the holy form
Of the ancient relic; —
Over the storm,
Through the gathered night,
Surely they hear
Again thy clear
'Let there be light!') (Hillyer 1922: 18–19)

However, humans do not understand how to manage the gift but put it on view *for et mat nysgerrigt Öie* ('for a bleary, curious eye') (in a museum), so the gods take their gift back: *Evigt bortsvandt Helligdommen* ('Holiness disappeared forever'). The horns should instead be used as sacral vessels, namely as chalices:

Jesu Blod paa Herrens Alter!
Fylde dem som Blod i Lunden. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 24)

(Christ's blood fill them, like the wonted
Blood beneath the sacred grove!) (Hillyer 1922: 21)

Oehlenschläger imagines that in antiquity the horns were used in a pagan sacrificial ritual and suggests, in the same breath, that both the pagan and the Christian religions are expressions of the same primal religiosity, because in both religions the ritual demands that people drink 'blood'. Antiquity is perceived as a lost golden age, which was followed by a Fall, but it should be sought at the present time recovered and on a higher plane. The treasures of antiquity ought therefore never to be used as harmless entertainment.

The gods are mentioned, moreover, not by their Old Norse names but exclusively as *de forklarede Gamle* ('the glorified Old Ones'), or *de forklarede Høie* ('the glorified High Ones'), which endows the poem with a more popular perspective than if the reader had had to keep track of many specific names of gods which still at that time had a relatively foreign sound.

Certain mythological names, here taken from Snorri's *Edda*, do appear, as the prelude to the find of both horns is described in a homonymous and magnificent stanza, in which the horses of night and day meet:

Hrymfaxe, den sorte
puster og dukker
og i Havet sig begraver.
Morgenens Porte
Delling oplukker,
og Skinfaxe traver
i straalende Lue
paa Himmelens Bue. (Topsøe-Jensen 1926–30: I, 21)

(Hrymfaxe the black
Snorts and plunges
Into the tide.
Delling flings back
the bolts of dawn.
The gate swings wide.
Skinfaxe lunges
up from the dark
On the heavenly arc.) (Hillyer 1922: 19–20)[8]

[8] The corresponding passage in Snorri's *Edda* (*SnE* 2005: 13) expresses the matter thus: *Þá tók Alfǫðr Nótt ok Dag, son hennar, og gaf þeim tvá hesta ok tvær kerrur og setti þau upp á himin*

Oehlenschläger's visions and his magnificent poetic diction came to determine many Danes' future views of Nordic antiquity, because he released the poetry which had lain hidden within the stylistic reticence of the Old Norse sources. However, Romantic diction could also in the long run prove inhibiting to a more modern and more sober approach to these sources.

at þau skulu ríða á hverjum tveim dægrum umhverfis jörðina. Ríðr Nótt fyrri þeim hesti er kallaðr er Hrímfaxi, ok at morni hverjum dǫggvir hann jǫrðina með méldropum sínum. Sá hestr er Dagr á heitir Skinfaxi og lýsir allt lopt ok jǫrðina af faxi hans ('Then All-father took Night and her son Day and gave them two horses and two chariots and set them up in the sky so that they have to ride around the earth every twenty-four hours. Night rides in front on the horse called Hrímfaxi, and every morning he bedews the earth with the drips from his bit. Day's horse is called Skinfaxi [shining-mane], and light is shed over all the sky and sea from his mane') (Faulkes 1987: 15).

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5.3 – Swedish Romanticism and Gothicism: Aesthetic Synergies

Mats Malm

While the aesthetic aspects of pre-Christian religion came to be developed during the Enlightenment in Sweden, patriotic ardour decreased. However, Romanticism provided a second wave of Gothicism, this time with a more cultural and — naturally enough — less historiographical bent. The natural philosophy of Schelling had most influentially established a view of the poet as the interpreter of his people's innermost beliefs and intuitions, with myths regarded as a sacred language connecting humans to higher dimensions. In that vein, Per Daniel Amadeus Atterbom (1790–1855) introduced the second annual volume of the radically romantic journal *Phosphoros* with a poem called *Skaldar-mal*. In the comments, he expands his notion of the Norse myths as *de ursprungliga Nordiska lärorna om Guds trefaldighet såsom Allfader (Enhet, Evighetens medelpunkt och ring,) Medelgud (Förstånd, Ljus, Logos) och Verldssjäl (Natur, Materia, Objekt)* ('the original Nordic faith in God's trinity as All-father (Unity, the middle and ring of Eternity), Middle/Mediating God (Reason, Light, Logos) and World Soul (Nature, Matter, Object)'). In the poem, Atterbom developed a corresponding poetic diction with strong Neoplatonic Schellingian traits and with reference to classical mythology (Lönnroth 1992). So, for example, Frigga is compared to an array of goddesses and to the Virgin Mary, and explained as the symbol of the feminine principle of divinity, which is matter. In the end, the description of her significance becomes rather straightforward, and she is portrayed

Mats Malm is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Gothenburg. His main fields are early modern and medieval Scandinavian literature and culture, as modelled on the heritage of antiquity.

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as *Natur-fortplantningens mysterium* ('the mystery of natural procreation'): a description explicitly based on the statue in the Uppsala temple according to Adam of Bremen (Atterbom 1811: 9). Still, Atterbom develops far more subtly symbolical meanings in the poem than common allegory would have allowed for.

Attempts to establish a Nordic pantheon on a par with that of antiquity and Christianity were also developed by Pehr Henrik Ling (1776–1839), who published his *Eddornas Sinnebildslära* ('The Symbolism of the Eddas') in 1819. While Schelling and the whole German Romantic tradition obviously lie behind Ling's discussion of poetry's poetic images of archaic wisdom in *Eddornas Sinnebildslära*, he shows no need to turn to them for authority. Instead, he constantly refers to Snorri Sturluson's account of pre-Christian natural religion as presented in the Prologue to his *Edda* and speaks of the Æsir as images of 'powers of nature'.

Pre-Christian Nordic myth was thus, in varying degrees of philosophical sophistication, suggested as a substitute for classical mythology. It was also compared to the Christian religion, but this aspect seems to have been of lesser importance to the Romantic Gothicists. The attempts to launch a Gothic aesthetics instead of the classical one stretched into the plastic arts, promoted not least by *Götiska förbundet* ('the Gothic society'), although one of its most prominent members, Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847), harshly rejected the attempt to trade classical myth for Nordic myths (Grandien 1987: 51–62; Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999: 21–22). One main tenet in Geijer's argument pertained to the nationalistic use: while sculptures of the classical deities were inherently universal, plastic art created with patriotic intentions — using Norse deities — would inevitably be too narrow (see the discussion in Chapter 6.2 below). Instead, Geijer recommended using the more earth-bound characters of the Icelandic sagas (Stenroth 2012: 46). Regardless of Geijer's critique, pre-Christian deities were a popular subject for a long time (Grandien 1987; Stenroth 2012). Geijer himself realized his ideas in poems concentrating on personal, although idealized, characters such as *Vikingen* ('The Viking') and *Odalbonden* ('The Yeoman').

Gothicism as such was always severely androcentric, and Geijer's version in particular injected this tendency into the gender relationships of the early nineteenth century. Thus, pre-Christian female deities came to incarnate very much subordinated ideals. Some female authors developed alternative uses of the Old Norse material, mostly using characters from the sagas, but on occasion also from mythology. So, Eleonora Charlotta d'Albedyhll published the epic *Gefion* in 1814. Here, the myth of the Æsir's migration from Troy is used freely, in an

appeal for peaceful work rather than competitive battle, which pointed at very different alternatives than prevailing notions (Borgström 1991: 37–150).

One of the most influential and widely diffused works of Swedish Romanticism, *Frithiofs saga* by Esaias Tegnér (1782–1846), could be seen as the ideal implementation of Geijer's recommendation. Printed in its entirety in 1825, it congenially adapted the original saga, published in Biörner's *Nordiska kämpa dater* ('Nordic Heroic Feats') (1737), into an epic poem which was to arouse massive interest. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the tendency in literary translations had been not, as previously, to render the work as the author could be expected to have written it had he lived at the time and in the society of the translation, but instead to move the reader to understand the original's wording, notions and mood. This ideal had gradually spread into other kinds of literature, and by the time of *Frithiofs saga*, Tegnér's mix of Old Norse metre, setting and characters was precisely right. The work was translated into several languages, and Germany especially thrived on a great number of different translations and adaptations (Stenroth 2011: 151–202; Wawn 1994; Wawn 2000: 117–32; Zernack 1997: 68–72).

Ling's practical realization of pre-Christian myth turned out to be much less successful than that of the other authors mentioned. In 1833, Ling published an epic on the migration of the Æsir into Sweden, entitled *Asarne*. The epic was immediately ridiculed — but it was also taken as the point of departure for a congenial merger of Gothicism with Romanticism.

C. J. L. Almqvist, probably the most versatile writer of Swedish Romanticism, was the zealous leader of the 'Manhem Order', where he elaborated Schellingian philosophy and Gothicist patriotism ('Manhem' was Rudbeck's word for old Sweden/Atlantis) into a transcendental-nationalistic ritual. However, in aesthetic practice, he put the nationalistic movement of Gothicism on a more modern track than had hitherto been seen. While Ling wrote an epic on the immigration of the Æsir, Almqvist wrote a novel on the immigration of Odin and his followers. The novel, *Sviavigamal*, was published in 1849 and does not claim to establish a historical past, nor does it explicitly expound the grand morals of the great Swedish people. Instead, Almqvist's description of how Odin and the Æsir reach Sweden and found a cultivated society is tender, non-authoritative, ambiguous and humorous all at the same time. The reason for the immigration is that Odin uses his ability to see into the future, which Snorri had told about, and thus comes to read Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, finding his own immigration so fascinating that he decides to act out the journey. If one did not know that Almqvist was actually devoted to Gothicist ideas, it would be easy to apprehend the novel simply as a parody of Gothicism, but

it is not as simple as that. What makes *Sviavigamal* different from the earlier Gothicist tradition is the influence of Romantic humour and irony. Almqvist inserted *Sviavigamal* as part of his larger cycle *Törnrosens bok*, introducing the novel with an essay originally written in *Aftonbladet* ten years before on Ling's *Asarne*. In the article, Almqvist develops thoughts that explain a great deal of *Sviavigamal*. His ideas concern the honesty and self-knowledge of the poet, the style and vivacity of the poem, and the question of truth. It has been demonstrated how, in defining truth, Almqvist connects with Aristotle's well-known distinction between the poet and the historian, where the poet, closer to philosophy, is freed from concern about whether particulars are historically true or not (Almer 2000: 66–83). Almqvist says with reference to Ling:

> Han har [...] icke skämtat, utan på fullt allvar trott sig kunna till historiska data förlika de strödda sago-uppgifterna. Han tyckes icke hava förstått, att den poetiska sanningen i sagan kan finnas fullkomlig och ren, fast utan faktism. Tavlan av ett land, skildringen av dess seder, kunna vara korrekt riktiga, om ock de personer, som omtalas, hetat annorlunda eller aldrig funnits, ja, om själva de händelser, som berättas, icke ens tilldragit sig. Det är på detta sätt dikt kan vara något helt annat än lögn; kan stundom vara dess fullständigaste motsats och sanningens bästa bundsförvant: den stora sanningens nämligen. Ty viktigare och större är en ren intuition, en ren bild av ett helt folks liv, rikt och sant framställd, än att veta om den föreställde personen just hetat Oluf eller Ubbe; om han bott vid Gripsholmsviken, eller vid Granfjärden. Historien får icke sätta sig över dessa betänkligheter—det är sant; men poesien får det. Det är just också derföre, som poesien har i sin makt, att komma den stora och för oss vigtigaste riktigheten mycket närmare, än historien: såvida skalden sjelf har sinne (har 'divination') nog, att fatta och återgifva det, som i hvarje tid, i hvarje land och hos hvarje folk utgjort det sanna tillståndet; om ock faktismen brister på uppgifter af alla data dertill. (1923: 16–17)

> (He did not joke, but seriously thought himself capable of forging scattered information from the sagas into historical facts. He seems not to have understood that the poetic truth of the saga may exist complete and pure, but without 'facticism' or excessive devotion to facts. The painting of a country, the description of its customs, may be correct, even if those persons mentioned had different names or never in fact existed, yes, even if the events that are described never happened. It is in this way, that poetry can be something entirely different from falsehood; sometimes even its complete opposite and the best helper of truth, that is, of the great truth. For pure intuition, a pure picture of the life of an entire nation, richly and truly presented, is more important and greater than knowing whether the person described was named Oluf or Ubbe; whether he lived by the bay of Gripsholm or Granfjärden. History may not choose to neglect these problems — that is true; but poetry can. This is precisely why poetry has the power to come closer to the great,

> and to us most important, correctness, than history: if the poet himself has enough sensibility (has 'divination') to grasp and relate what in every age, in every country and in every nation were true conditions; even if 'facticism' lacks information of all details.)

Aristotle is not named here, but the correspondence to the ninth chapter of his *Poetics* is evident in the polarization of poet and historian, where the latter is bound to facts which the former is free to leave in order to approach a greater truth that is common to both. Aristotle's stress on universality may consequently be mirrored in Almqvist's words that the poet catches 'the true state in each time, in each country and in each people' — thus, Almqvist transforms Aristotelian universality into a historicist interest in the *Geist* of the people. The argument has been shown to end in the conclusion that poetry reaches truth *because* it does not try to appear true (Hermansson 2006: 165–69).

In practice, Almqvist's statement allows him to create a mildly humorous story in which nothing needs to be considered false and, conversely, nothing needs to be considered true. That is, in this example of Romantic irony, the signifying and the signified parts of the trope *ironia* can endlessly shift the burden of truthfulness. Irony is not saying *this* and meaning *that* as in rhetoric, but saying *this* and perhaps meaning *that* or maybe meaning *this* — or both, yet without certitude. This liberates Gothicism from having to choose between historical 'facts' and also from having to maintain a certain moral standpoint. So, the immigration of the Æsir can be minutely described without any claim of historical truth, but also without disclaiming it. As yet another layer of detachment, the fiction is broken by Ling himself when he meets the Æsir in *Sviavigamal* with questions of why their arrival does not accord with his book *Asarne*.

Almqvist is able not only to posit *this* and also mean *that*, but also *maybe not this* and *maybe not that*, or perhaps *something other*. This oscillation of reference is made possible by the kind of referentiality that belongs to the symbol, since Romantic irony should probably be described as the exploitation of the existence of two different systems of referentiality: that of the trope and that of the symbol. Almqvist renews traditional Gothicism by liberating himself from the demand of proving a particular historical past. Thus, Romantic aesthetics provides the salvation of Gothicism and the reuse of pre-Christian religion.

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5.4 – The Norwegian Reception during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

Jan Ragnar Hagland

The Romantic reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North in Norway seems to stand apart from the trend, as it were, in other parts of Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. It cannot be properly understood without having the pre-Romantic reception as a necessary backdrop — that is to say, the reception of Old Norse literature in general in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dano-Norwegian writing. What happened in this respect after 1814, the year in which Norway gained its own constitution and thus became politically separate from Denmark, may be seen first and foremost as a continuation of tendencies in the Norwegian context already established in the pre-Romantic period. The consequence of this was, as we shall see, that Norway did not quite follow general Romantic trends where the reception of pre-Christian religions of the North is concerned. The aim of the present contribution to this volume is to try briefly to account for this somewhat distanced position.

The idea of seeking to define a separate Norwegian literary tradition as early as the late eighteenth century need not be attributed to any crude nationalistic approach to literary history. An awareness of Norwegian identity was observed and commented upon by contemporary eighteenth-century observers such as the Danish historian Peter Frederik Suhm, who clearly distinguished between Norwegians and Danes. In a eulogy on the freedom of the press in Denmark-

Jan Ragnar Hagland is Professor of Old Norse Philology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. He has published widely in the fields of Old Norse philology, Nordic language history and runology, including a history of the Norwegian language (2016).

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Norway in 1771, he remarked that 'the Norwegians feel more strongly than do the Danes that they are a people' (cf. Hagland 1994: 27). Suhm lived in Trondheim at that time and most likely based observations such as this upon discussions in circles of the upper middle classes in which he moved. A growing awareness of Norwegian as an independent language can also be observed during the course of the eighteenth century (Hagland 2011). The most striking evidence for an awareness of Norwegian identity in late eighteenth-century literature, however, is no doubt the existence of a literary circle known as *Det Norske Selskab* ('The Norwegian Society') organized by a group of young Norwegian *literati* in Copenhagen after 1772 (cf. Hagland 1994: 28). To a degree, then, it is justifiable to speak of a separate Norwegian literature even in the eighteenth century.

The important question, in the context that interests us here, is how or if the reception or response to Old Norse myth and literature can be observed in Norwegian eighteenth-century literature, however imprecisely defined. As is well documented elsewhere in the present volume, the response to Old Norse myth and literature observable in late eighteenth-century European writing has been seen as an aspect of a more general quest for literary 'sublimity' and, thus, as a part of a pre-Romantic reaction against classicism. So, the important question for us to ask here is whether or not the Norwegians of this period turned, with any enthusiasm, towards the sublime. The answer to that must be in the negative, at least as far as the dominant literary circle is concerned. Det Norske Selskab was quite strongly opposed to the kinds of literary tendencies represented by, for example, Ewald in Denmark and Klopstock in Germany. Rather than turning to the Scandinavian distant past, the literary ideals of this group were sought in classical antiquity, *Vos exemplaria Græca* being their motto (cf. Hagland 1994: 28–29).

There is, however, evidence to show that Norwegian literature in the second half of the eighteenth century displays a measure of interest in and enthusiasm for the glorious Northern past (cf. Blanck 1911, ch. 5). So, when looking for evidence of a Norwegian reception of Old Norse literary tradition in the period up to *c*. 1830, we need to have the existence of emerging national sentiments in mind. We need to look for and identify a reception that relates first and foremost to Norwegian patriotism or incipient nationalism. It seems reasonable to claim that in this respect the work of the historian Gerhard Schøning (1722–80) on early Norwegian history, published from 1769 onwards (cf. Hagland 1994: 29), was seminal and helped to stimulate a kind of nationalistic tone which can be observed in Norwegian belletristic work of the time. Schøning's Norwegian history (*Norges Riiges Historie*) in three volumes,

it should be added, covers the period of prehistory and ends in the year 996 with Óláfr Tryggvason (cf. Hagland 1998: 168), the term *Norges Riige*, 'the realm of Norway', being significant in the patriotic context in which the work was published. Schøning's depiction of the glorious past was to a large extent based on Snorri Sturluson's work, first and foremost on the *Heimskringla*, but also on the *Edda* and some sagas, notably *fornaldarsögur*.

The major Norwegian literary exponent of the patriotic pathos generated by Schøning's work was without doubt Johan Nordahl Brun (1745–1816). In addition Christen Pram (1757–1821) and Hans Jacob Wille (1756–1808) deserve mention in this context. Dealing first with Brun, we note that he had been Schøning's student at the Cathedral School in Trondheim: *Han oplivede, o Norge, dine forlængst hensovne Helte* ('He revived, oh Norway! your heroes long since passed away') was Brun's comment on his former headmaster (Bull 1945: vii). This may be true in more senses than one. The Trondheim school where Schøning served as headmaster from 1751 to 1765 seems to have actively encouraged its students to take an interest in their Nordic past. So it is that we learn from the official programme for the school's graduation festivities on 19 December 1769 that each of the seven graduating students was to offer a short address, in Danish or in Latin, on Old Norse mythology. In 1771 Johan Nordahl Brun, then the secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in Trondheim, founded by Schøning and others in 1760, tried to stimulate the poetic energies and talents of his compatriots by offering a prize of twenty 'Species Ducater' for the best poem about King Haraldr harðráði (Bull 1945: vii).

There are no traces in the Academy's archives of any responses to this generous initiative. It seems pertinent, however, to connect this particular initiative to Brun's own interest in the Norwegian past and his use of King Haraldr (1047–66) as one of the protagonists in *Einer Tambeskielver* ('Einar Paunchshaker') (1772), a play generally regarded as his major work, having the rivalry between the chieftain Einarr Þambarskelfir and King Haraldr as its main topic. It is significant that Johan Nordahl Brun's literary interests, as revealed by his choice of subject matter, were directed towards *Heimskringla* rather than Snorri's *Edda* and religious myths. And this play is certainly a major factor in securing a presence for Snorri in eighteenth-century Norwegian literature. Apart from occasional breaches of unity of place, the play accords well with the formal requirements of neoclassical tragedy. It seems likely, then, that by setting his Old Norse subject matter in a neoclassical framework, Johan Nordahl Brun was seeking to establish a dignified and civilized past for the people of Norway. There is, at any rate, reason to claim that the pre-Romantic Brun regarded the Nordic past as insufficiently distant in time to be conceived of as

exotic and wild; and thus to offer no stimulus for the creation of 'sublime' aesthetic effects through images of blood and assorted spectral horrors that could be found elsewhere in Europe at the time. This is very much the same ideology as that to which Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910) was to give expression nearly a century later in 1861, well into the Romantic period — the importance of establishing that sense of pride in ancestry which every people striving for nationhood needed to experience.[1] It seems, in consequence, that the implicit patriotic attitude based on saga literature in Johan Nordahl Brun's play lasts, to a degree, for almost a century in Norwegian literature. It may be seen to be framed in, as it were, by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen's use of saga literature as subject matter in their historic plays from the 1850s and early 1860s in order to create, as Bjørnson expressed it, this pride, this *Ahnernes Stolthed* as we have just seen. Even if Johan Nordahl Brun was an exponent of neoclassical drama in the context that interests us here, there is no reason to maintain that a patriotic or nationalistic programme needed to associate itself with any particular literary form or style. Such sentiments could and did find expression in a variety of ways.

A possible supplement to Brun's play may be found in Christen Pram's verse sequence *Stærkodder* (1785), *en Rimkrønike* or 'rhymed chronicle' as the poet himself calls it. This is an allegorical heroic poem in fifteen songs, based on myths about the Danish hero Sterkoddr (Old Norse Starkaðr). Significant in the present context is the fact that Pram makes his hero a Norwegian rather than a Dane. Christen Pram certainly had links with Det Norske Selskab in Copenhagen where he lived, but he was born at Lesja in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway, and thus invariably referred to as a Norwegian poet and author — a perfect illustration of the difficulties involved in defining Norwegian literature in the period prior to 1814. Christen Pram did not perhaps share in full the neoclassical ideals of his co-members in the Norwegian literary society, even if his first literary activities were devoted to translating from Greek and Latin. The sequence of fifteen lengthy dactylic poems which make up *Stærkodder* should be read definitively as a political allegory (the poet himself says so): an allegory, it should be underscored, in which Norwegian patriotism is well to the fore. Pram's treatment of his Old Norse sources is very free and based on secondary material, such as Peter Frederik Suhm's treatise on Odin (Suhm 1771), Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and others. His use of Old Norse subject matter has been

[1] 'Før vi har et historisk Galleri har vi heller ikke den Ahnernes Stolthed som ethvert for Nationalitet kjæmpende Folk maa have, heller ikke den nødvendige Berettigelse ligeovenfor de Andre' (cf. Bull 1937: 478).

severely criticized. Blanck in particular (1911: 225) objects to the poet's ignorance of Old Norse myth as well as Old Norse literature. Nonetheless, it seems fair to say that Christen Pram's poems represent a significant contribution to the early Norwegian reception of Snorri's *Edda* and also of *Heimskringla* thus, to a degree, pulling in the same direction as Johan Nordahl Brun's *Einer Tambeskielver*.

Finally, a third piece of work needs to be discussed in the present context to show that there *was* an attempt at establishing a Norwegian reception of Norse mythology in the late eighteenth century: Hans Jacob Wille's *Udtog af den nordiske Mythologie* ('Excerpts from Norse Mythology') (1787). Wille's small book, which is quite different in kind to the publications of Johan Nordahl Brun and Christen Pram, has been largely neglected and almost completely ignored in historical work on Norse mythology and literature (cf. Hagland 1994: 33–38; also Chapter 8.1 below). Thus the impact of Wille's attempted contribution to a wider reception of Old Norse myth is difficult to assess. We know next to nothing about the book's distribution. The ambition behind it may be reflected by the complete title of the work in which its Norwegian context is accentuated — *Udtog af den nordiske Mythologie eller Othins Gudelære i Norge* ('Excerpts from Norse Mythology or the Mythology of Othin in Norway'). It has, as it seems, an inclination towards popular education which may have been somewhat premature in both Norway and Denmark during the late 1780s. Its critical reception, insofar as it had one at all, seems to have been marked by condescending indifference. Grundtvig was one of the very few, if not the only one, to pay any attention to Wille's work on Norse mythology. In the preface to the 1808 edition of *Nordens Mytologi* Grundtvig identifies a number of reasons for making available sources of knowledge about the Norse gods (1808: xiv). Obviously referring to the situation in Denmark more than in Norway, Grundtvig maintains in this preface that the principal reason for the growing interest in Norse mythology during the first decade of the nineteenth century was the works of Adam Oehlenschläger: *Da Oehlenschlägers Harpe klang [frembrød] i de mere Udvikledes Barm en inderlig Længsel efter at kende Norden Guder* ('When Oehlenschläger's harp resounded, a genuine longing to know more about the gods of the North emerged in the hearts of the more advanced people') (Grundtvig 1808: xiv). The main reason for lack of mythological knowledge even among the more advanced (*de mere Udviklede*) was that the principal source for such knowledge, the *Edda*, was inaccessible to most of the general public — 'no access to the *Edda* existed other that the *Edda* itself', Grundtvig says, the *Edda* itself being Resen's 1665 edition of Snorri's *Edda*. This was so, according to Grundtvig, because Suhm (1771) had done noth-

ing but collect, that is, he had not done anything significant beyond excerpting material, whereas Wille, Bastholm (1802) and Møinichen (1800) had tried in vain to teach others what they did not know themselves. These remarks seem to have sealed the fate of Wille's contribution to the understanding of Norse mythology. We hear virtually nothing of it thereafter.

Through the work of Hans Jacob Wille and Christen Pram, then, we may note a late eighteenth-century *Norwegian* reception of Old Norse myth and literature that has some similarities with trends that were more clearly pronounced elsewhere in Scandinavia and Europe. But Norwegian interest in Old Norse literature paid heed primarily to history — to the kings' sagas in particular. It shared nothing of the fondness for ideas about the wild and exotic Norse past, about that pursuit of the sublime which so characterized the reception of Old Norse writings in eighteenth-century Denmark, England and Germany. Such a notion could play no part in a project whose principal aim was the construction of a national identity which was to be so important a part of Norwegian literature and art in the years thereafter. Norway thus definitively stands apart in the context that interests us here.

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5.5 – Old Norse Myths and Icelandic Romanticism

Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson*

The Romantic Revival

Classical myths and legends had by the eighteenth century become such a long-standing frame of reference, and indeed one over-used as a model in literature, that writers, especially those working in the northern part of Europe, began questioning the relevance of the gods and heroes of ancient Greece to the ways of life so far removed from the South. Why should the literature of the North not make use of its own mythology? This was the question posed by the University of Copenhagen in 1800, when it offered a prize for the best answer in arguing the case for the Old Norse myths, against the Greek myths, as an inspiration for contemporary literature (see further discussion below in Chapter 6.2.1). One of the answers submitted was written by the young Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850), who went on to become a leading Romantic in Denmark and the Nordic countries, writing numerous poetic pieces dealing with mythological themes and other Old Norse material (see above Chapter 5.2). In his seminal poem *Guldhornene* ('The Golden Horns') (1803), Oehlenschläger offered a Romantic view of the Nordic past by writing about the actual discovery of a pair of ancient golden artefacts which then disappeared mysteriously, leaving behind the idea of a 'golden age' that might still return to the North (Greenway 1977: 1–4).

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Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson is Professor of Icelandic Literature at the University of Iceland. His field of expertise is modern Icelandic literature (1600–1900), including the reception of medieval literature, Romanticism and environmental studies (ecocriticism).

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A revival and reinvention of medieval themes and motifs was to follow throughout Scandinavia, prompting writers and poets to define contemporary issues in the light of their common cultural heritage from the Middle Ages. But Old Norse mythology did not only join Scandinavian poets, it also divided them, as each tried to claim it as their own or channel it through their poetry in such a way that they alone could be seen to be the true inheritors of the Old Norse spirit. A case in point is the Danish scholar-poet N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) who used Old Norse mythology extensively as an inspiration in his poetic works (see further Chapter 8.1 below and Volune II, Chapter 1.1). But Grundtvig argued for a more critical understanding of the medieval sources, criticizing his countryman Oehlenschläger for what he considered to be a rather simplistic and sentimentalized rendition of the old mythology. Grundtvig claimed Oehlenschläger and other Romantic poets had failed to grasp the real drama and tragedy of the heathen cosmology, which according to him was reflected in the tragic role and character of the god Óðinn. Grundtvig emphasized Óðinn's ever-present awareness of what would eventually happen at Ragnarök, when the world would come to an end, and with it, his ill-fated attempts to change its destiny (Ægidius 1985: 25–27).

Grundtvig wrote a monograph on Old Norse myths called *Nordens Mytologi*, a popular work that combined source criticism and poetic insight, originally published in 1808 and again in a revised form in 1832. By that time the comparative method had become an accepted way of looking at myths, and scholars ventured into wide-ranging comparisons between the Old Norse material and other Indo-European myths and religions (see further Chapter 7.1 below and Volume II, Part 3). Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847), already an established Old Norse scholar through his work on the Arnamagnæan Commission's critical edition of the Poetic Edda, published the voluminous *Eddalæren og dens Oprindelse I–IV* (1824–26), in which he offered his own interpretation of the mythology. As Andrew Wawn puts it, 'Finnur's theory, romantic to the core, was that the myths reflected primitive responses, sensuous and intense, to the natural forces governing individuals' lives since the dawn of civilisation' (Wawn 2000: 189). This all-encompassing and Romantic view certainly helped popularize the mythology, but it was also criticized, as Margaret Clunies Ross points out: 'Even in his own day, Finnur Magnússon's comparative and highly speculative interpretations of Norse mythology aroused strong criticism, particularly from rival mythographers such as Grundtvig and Jakob Grimm, though their own interpretations were often just as speculative' (Clunies Ross 2011: 56). As a prominent if criticized Icelander living in Denmark, Finnur Magnússon undoubtedly became an inspiration for his fellow countrymen, and his mytho-

logical studies may well have encouraged poets to make use of Old Norse material in their writings, as Simon Halink has suggested (Halink 2015).

Icelandic poets contributed to the revival and reinvention of Old Norse myths in the nineteenth century. In what follows I will argue that the old mythology, once revived, would go on to play an important part in the poetic definition of the character of the Nordic countries, as well as being connected to both national and international issues. As in the case of Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig, mythological material could become a debated issue between individual Icelandic poets, who responded to each other in creative and suggestive ways. This contemporary and discursive element is what should be the major concern of the student of myths, according to the scholar Anthony Harding. In his study of the reception of myths in English Romanticism, he points out that myths are constantly in the process of being reinterpreted as they reach a new audience (Harding 1995: 1–24). Rather than look upon these interpretations as something secondary or inferior to the supposed originality of comparable myths in ancient times, it is necessary to historicize such myths and to put them into the context of their times. When a modern author alludes to an old myth, he or she is of necessity reinventing it or making it new, often responding at the same time both to contemporary issues and present circumstances.

I will use the term *myth* in the general sense of a traditional narrative involving a supernatural force or deity. There is bound to be some overlap with another time-honoured term, *legend* — a narrative of human actions perceived by both teller and listeners to have taken place within human history — depending, as we shall see, on the level of supernatural content. This is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of the reception of myth in Icelandic Romanticism, but rather an attempt at evaluating the part it plays in the writings of some leading Romantic writers by looking at a number of texts I have selected from their output, mainly poems. As we shall see, the revival of Old Norse mythology gathered momentum as the nineteenth century wore on, appearing sporadically or occasionally in the writings of the first Icelandic Romantics but playing an ever-greater part in the writings of the younger generations of Romantic poets.

Bjarni Thorarensen

Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841) is generally credited with being the first Icelandic Romantic. He concluded his grammar school education in Iceland and then went to Denmark to study at the University of Copenhagen, as did in fact all the writers we will discuss here. Bjarni proved to be a brilliant student and enrolled at the university at the young age of sixteen, where he studied Law

from 1803 to 1807, staying in Copenhagen until 1811, when he returned to his home country, where he eventually became one of the heads of the Icelandic administration. During his stay in Copenhagen, Bjarni became well acquainted with Romanticism, as it was heralded by proponents such as Henrik Steffens (1773–1845), who lectured on German Romanticism at Elers' Kollegium from 1802–04 and, not least, as it was channelled through the work of Oehlenschläger, who soon became a favourite poet of his. Already in 1808, at the age of twenty-one, Bjarni was writing poetry that can be considered Romantic, and he was at the same time doing research on eddic poetry as a recipient of a stipend from the Arnamagnæan Foundation. Romanticism and Old Norse studies thus went together in his case and became a great inspiration for him as a poet, resulting in a creative fusion of modern and medieval subject matter and form. He was taken by the diction and metres of the eddic poems and they, along with connected themes and motifs, figure prominently in his original works.

Old Norse myths certainly appealed to Bjarni Thorarensen as a poet, but the degree to which they shaped his poetry is debatable. If one regards the legend-based heroic lays of the Poetic Edda as mythical, inasmuch as they deal with the supernatural, it can be argued that Old Norse mythology played an important role in his poetry. For instance, he drew a parallel between modern lovers and the heroic lovers of the eddic lays, whose love knew no boundaries and recognized neither distance nor death when it came to being near the loved one. The lover in one of his poems, *Sigrúnarljóð* ('Song of Sigrún') (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935: I, 75–77), first published in 1847, vows to love his girl as passionately and carnally, should she die, as he loves her now, while she is still alive. The lovers here closely resemble Helgi Hundingsbani and Sigrún in the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana önnur* ('The Second Lay of Helgi the Hunding-Slayer'). This old lay tells of Sigrún's visit to the mound of her warrior lover, Helgi, who has returned briefly from the dead after having been killed in battle. They spend the night together in the mound, much to the dismay and horror of Sigrún's maid, who says that a lady should not sleep in the arms of a dead man. Helgi then has to return to Óðinn in Valhöll, leaving the world of the living for good. Bjarni's use of these eddic themes borders on necrophilia; it is a sublime elevation of Romantic love and at the same time has touches of the Gothic horror then fashionable in some nineteenth-century circles. When Bjarni writes about love in another poem, *Freyjukettirnir* ('Freyja's Cats'), first published in 1839 (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935: I, 179–81), he coquettishly alludes to the cats that were said to pull the chariot of Freyja, the Old Norse goddess of love. The poet makes these cats symbolize love of old and new in a teasing way, playfully saying that they differ from other cats in that they catch men, not mice.

Bjarni Thorarensen's allusions to Old Norse mythology are interesting but limited in the sense that they do not seem to become a significant factor in giving shape to his poetry as a whole. Certain myths and legends can inspire him in individual poems, but Old Norse mythology as such can hardly be said to be a governing principle in his poetical output. Bjarni did, however, adhere to a poetical ideology of a kind, to which younger Icelandic poets responded, as we shall see. He was preoccupied with the Nordic or Icelandic spirit and how natural forces and living conditions in the North could enhance it. I will account for these ideas later on, in connection with the writings of Benedikt Gröndal, but they are of a more general kind and not restricted to the Old Norse myths as Bjarni saw them.

Jónas Hallgrímsson

The first Icelandic Romantics alluded to Old Norse mythology in their works, but they seldom devoted whole poems to mythological themes. They were interested enough in the old mythology, but perhaps the common mythological allusions of the Icelandic *rímur*-poets of the preceding centuries made them hesitant about using or reinventing the old myths in an extensive way in their own works. Indeed, the most influential Romantic in Iceland, the poet and natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–45), attacked the *rímur*-poets mercilessly for what he saw as their uninspired and tasteless poetic diction, not least their mythological kennings, in a scathing review in the periodical *Fjölnir* in 1837 (see Jónas Hallgrímsson 1989: 356–66). It therefore comes as no surprise to discover that he did not make much use of material based on Old Norse mythology in his poems, although he learned a lot from the anonymous authors of the Poetic Edda and often used metres based on the eddic tradition (Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 1999: 29–78, 315–39). Jónas occasionally uses phrases and lines derived from the mythological lays of the Poetic Edda such as *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, but they seldom shape his poetry in any deeper sense. This is not to say that individual poems by him cannot be interpreted on a mythological level, as the scholar and novelist Svava Jakobsdóttir has done in her inventive reading of *Ferðalok* ('Journeys' End'), which she sees as corresponding to *Vǫluspá* on a number of mythological points (Svava Jakobsdóttir 1999: 107–19).

Jónas Hallgrímsson was certainly interested in Old Norse mythology on a scholarly basis, as can be gathered from his short essays on the goddess Gefjun ('Gefjun', Jónas Hallgrímsson 1989: 379–81) and on the fourteenth stanza of *Vǫluspá* (*En hypotese om forklaringen af Völuspás 14de strofe* ('A Hypothesis about the Explanation of *Völuspá*'s 14th Stanza') Jónas Hallgrímsson

1989: 382–89). Both essays, written in Danish, probably in 1844, take notice of prominent Old Norse scholars such as Finnur Magnússon and Karsten Friis Wiborg (1813–85). Even though Jónas had specialized in the natural sciences at the University of Copenhagen, taking his final examinations in mineralogy and geology in 1838, he was no stranger to philological or even archaeological work. While travelling around Iceland in the years 1839–42, working on a geological description of the country, he had collected antiquities and investigated runic inscriptions on behalf of Finnur Magnússon (Finnur presided over the Copenhagen Division of the Icelandic Literary Society, which had agreed to publish Jónas's scientific work on Iceland, although he died before it came to fruition; see Ringler 2000: 36–72). The essay on *Vǫluspá* centres on the register of dwarfs in which Jónas sees a linguistic connection, through names of persons and places, with Finnmark and Lapland. He also points to the *Kalevala* epic and clearly understands the eddic poem as belonging to an international context, echoing the comparative method of mythographers such as Finnur. Jónas's essay on Gefjun again shows him working as a comparatist, carefully covering the sources in which the goddess is mentioned — both in the Poetic and the Prose Edda — and offering his own interpretation of her importance in Old Norse mythology. The Romantics seem to have been drawn to feminine deities, Benedikt Gröndal being the obvious case, writing extensively on the goddess Freyja as we shall see, also using one of her names as a title of his periodical *Gefn* (issued 1870–74).

It awaited the next generation of Icelandic Romantics to pursue the mythology further and use particular myths and tales of the supernatural as a creative background to their poetry. One of these writers was Grímur Thomsen.

Grímur Thomsen

Grímur Thomsen (1820–96) was a well-read poet and literary scholar, who in 1845 published, in Danish, the first full-length study of Lord Byron in the Nordic countries (Thomsen 1845), having previously written a book on contemporary French poetry (for a critical study of his writings on English and French literature, see Kristján Jóhann Jónsson 2004). Besides being a Byron scholar, Grímur wrote extensively on Old Norse literature (some of it in English, see Grímur Thomsen 1972 [1867]). Among his critical writings is an impressive essay on the gods of the North. Grímur shows a keen awareness of the tragic character of Óðinn's vision of Ragnarök and his attempts at reversing the fated course of things. And yet the fate of the gods is tragi-comical, both humorous and sublime, according to Grímur:

> But what is humour, if not Ragnarok's swallowing up of the gods, themselves knowing that they are no true gods, and in the midst of their daily strife and toil aware of their decay? And what is sublime, if not the assurance that this evening twilight of the gods, which threatens them with the gloom of a northern winter night, while the storm howls in the branches of the world's tree, and the serpent gnaws at its root, — is to make way for a better world and one almighty All-father? (Thomsen 1972 [1867]: 58)

The concluding remark could be compared to Grundtvig's view of the heathen world as a kind of foreshadowing of the Christian one (see Lundgreen-Nielsen 1965: 20–27; Ægidius 1985: 32–35). But Grímur also wrote a number of poems dealing with motifs and themes derived from the old mythology.

Hákon jarl, first published in 1895, is an interesting poem in this respect (Grímur Thomsen 1969 [1934]: 227–28). Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson of Hlaðir is a prominent character in some Old Norse narratives, for instance, in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. In the medieval sources, the Jarl of Hlaðir is described as one of the last upholders of the heathen religion in the North, living in a time when the Christian religion was being adopted throughout the Nordic countries. The Jarl must be considered to be one of the most sinister and terrible characters in Old Norse literature, a fierce Norwegian who continued to worship the heathen gods in Christian times. But Grímur tries to give a more positive image of the Jarl of Hlaðir in his poem. He makes him something of a hero, an upholder of the old values in the shape of the ancient mythological world tree of Yggdrasill, or as he puts it: *Hákon einn með afli styður | Yggdrasil, þótt skjálfi viður* ('Hákon alone supports Yggdrasill with force, even though the tree trembles'; Grímur Thomsen 1969 [1934]: 227). And in his attempt to show this black character in a more favourable light, Grímur passes silently over some uncomfortable descriptions of the Jarl in the medieval sources. For instance, *Jómsvíkinga saga* ('The Saga of the Jómsvikings') tells us that the Jarl sacrificed his own son to the gods in order to win an impending battle against the Jómsvíkingar. This gruesome sacrifice of a seven-year-old results in the appearance of a supernatural being, Þorgerðr Hörðabrúðr, a horrible troll-woman, who then proceeds to kill the Jómsvíkingar one by one, and thus indicates that the heathen powers favour the Jarl's sacrifice of his son. Grímur mentions none of this in his poem but instead focuses on the Jarl's death at the hand of his own slave, who in the medieval sources is said to have cut his master's throat. This is an unheroic and even laughable death to all appearances, but Grímur somehow manages to make the Jarl of Hlaðir sympathetic in the end, saying in his poem that even if he was no saint, he surely deserved a more decent death than to be killed and betrayed by his own slave.

Grímur Thomsen does, however, draw attention to the Jarl's unpleasant character traits and evil deeds in *Jarlsníð* ('Abuse of the Jarl'), another poem focusing on the supernatural, first published in 1891 (Grímur Thomsen 1969 [1934]: 200–03). It is based on a short medieval narrative, *Þorleifs þáttr jarlaskálds* ('The Short Tale of Þorleifr Jarls' poet'), which tells of a young Icelander who sails to Norway and is approached there by the Jarl himself, who wants to buy goods from him. Þorleifr declines the offer and says he would rather do business with somebody else. The Jarl takes this as an insult and is so enraged that he has all the valuables confiscated from Þorleifr's boat and then burns the boat itself. The Icelander has not said his last word, however, and proves to be a resourceful individual, endowed with both poetical and magical skills.

At Yuletide, a rough old beggar appears at the Jarl's court at Hlaðir, and it is at this point that Grímur's poem takes up the story from the *þáttr*. The beggar offers to recite some poetry, and he then uses the verses to level various criticisms at the Jarl himself. He brings up and recounts many of the Jarl's wicked acts, such as the gruesome sacrifice of his own son. The power and, indeed, the sorcery of the poetry are so great that it has physical effects on the Jarl and eventually renders him unconscious. When he regains consciousness after the beggar has left, the Jarl realizes with whom he has been dealing. In the medieval *þáttr*, the Jarl exacts the final revenge, when he uses magic to create a man out of wood and instructs him to follow Þorleifr back to Iceland and to kill him there, which he duly does. In contrast, Grímur ends his poem immediately after Þorleifr has left the court at Hlaðir. He even has the Jarl respond rather gracefully to Þorleifr's revenge, admitting that he had every right to be angry and behave as he did. One should not enrage the poets, the Jarl concludes, because of the fierceness of their revenge. The concluding remarks in the poem show the Jarl in a much more positive light than in the *þáttr*, where he is described as a terrible and revengeful tyrant and black magician.

As if to emphasize the major role of the Jarl of Hlaðir in upholding the old order of the heathen gods and times, Grímur Thomsen wrote yet another poem, *Ásareiðin* ('The Ride of the Heathen Gods'), first published in 1885 (Grímur Thomsen 1969 [1934]: 113–16). There he depicts the Jarl accompanying the grand old gods in their magnificent ride through the skies, as they abandon the world at the advent of Christendom, thus granting this latter-day apostle of theirs the place he deserved. This poem furthermore shows how difficult it is — and indeed questionable — to exclude the legendary from the mythological, when accounting for the Romantic rewriting of Old Norse myths and medieval sources. In Grímur's poem, mythological beings and legendary characters all form one lengthy continuum, whether they are heathen gods, valkyries and heroes from the

Poetic Edda or characters such as Jarl Hákon. Inasmuch as they are supernatural, they all belong to the same sphere, whether earthly or heavenly creatures.

There is no doubt that Grímur Thomsen's creative use or reinvention of Old Norse saga motifs and mythology is part and parcel of his declared interest in the so-called Scandinavism of the nineteenth century (Kristján Jóhann Jónsson 2014: 164–69). This was a movement of Scandinavian students and intellectuals whose objective it was to enhance the sense of fellow-feeling among the people of the Nordic nations, emphasizing what they had in common, and in particular, reminding them of the important literary heritage they shared. In his younger years, Grímur lectured extensively on behalf of this movement, and although much of his poetry was written later, in advanced age (he was a late bloomer as a poet), it can be seen as a poetical attempt to support these same Nordic ideals. Grímur was a great if somewhat misunderstood nationalist, for his fellow countrymen did not always realize that his patriotism embraced not only Iceland but all the other Nordic nations as well. His selection of subject matter for his poetry from Old Norse literature shows this clearly. He does not only write about exclusively Icelandic matters such as the Icelandic family sagas, but rather on sagas dealing with the Nordic countries as a whole, for instance the kings' sagas and the *fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, that is, the mythic-heroic or legendary sagas. This is also true of Grímur's views of Old Norse mythology. He considered it not to be exclusively Icelandic but rather as reflecting the ideas of the Nordic countries as a whole, which is why he assigns it such an elevated place in his lectures and poetry.

A part of Grímur Thomsen's campaign was problematizing the characters and deities described in the medieval sources and making them relevant to contemporary critical thought. His sympathetic and complicated treatment of the Jarl of Hlaðir and the heathen gods can be viewed in this light. He was generally sympathetic to those who went against the stream and took an independent stand in the world, but he also saw in the Jarl of Hlaðir an interesting character capable of enhancing the fellow-feeling of the Nordic nations and urging them not to renounce their common heritage, even if it went against what was fashionable in the wider European context of the nineteenth century. Grímur was not advocating heathendom as such but rather showing that the people of the North should be proud of what they had in common and that they would only find their place among the modern nations of the world if they were willing to reclaim the shared values and identity to be found in the heroic and mythic literature of the medieval period. In his interpretation, the heathen gods of the North are flawed and doomed, as is their fierce apostle, Jarl Hákon, but Grímur sees in their twilight a tragic grandeur worthy of serious consideration.

Benedikt Gröndal

Benedikt Sveinbjarnarson Gröndal (1826–1907) was both a scholar and a poet. Widely respected during his lifetime for his poetry, he is today better known for his prose, particularly his *Sagan af Heljarslóðarorustu* ('The Story of the Battle of Solferino'), a humorous romance written in the medieval Icelandic fashion, the subject being Napoleon III's Italian campaign of 1859 (first published in Copenhagen in 1861 and many times since), and his memoirs, *Dægradvöl* ('Pastimes') (published posthumously in 1923). Gröndal was the son of the renowned classical scholar and translator of Homer, Sveinbjörn Egilsson. In a way, this made it easier for him to enter the world of learning and poetry; however, it also made it more difficult for him to follow in his acclaimed father's footsteps. Whether owing to this or not, Gröndal's literary fame never sat easily, but his poetry surely deserves more attention than it has received in the last century or so.

Old Norse mythology was one of Gröndal's greatest interests, and it is the subject of a number of scholarly works by him (for instance, he published a long essay on the myth of the giant Hrungnir in the periodical *Annaler for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* in 1860). The mythology and its reinvention also play a major role in his poetry, not least the myth of the love goddess Freyja, to which he often refers. His epic to Freyja was *Brísingamen*, a narrative poem originally published in the poet's own journal *Gefn* in 1871 (re-issued with some alterations in *Dagrún*, a book of poems; see Benedikt Gröndal 1906: 55–60). This epic is based on various sources from medieval times, especially the Eddas. In his *Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson mentions Freyja's husband by the name of Óðr. Not much is to be gathered about her husband from Snorri's *Edda* or from the Poetic Edda for that matter, except that he seems to have been away from home most of the time, which is said to be the reason for the frequent tears of Freyja. But the name of Gröndal's poem is an allusion to the famous Brísingamen, the love goddess's necklace and her arch-symbol according to the old sources. In the poem he makes use of these vague allusions to Freyja's husband and really invents a new myth on Óður's journey to the South, where he meets the Greek sun god Apollo, thus melding together Old Norse and classical mythologies. Gröndal alludes to the South as the classical seat of learning in Europe, and also as the originating place of the idea of romantic love. Apollo receives his Northern colleague favourably and indeed points out to him a magic flower, a powerful rose that, if picked at the right moment, will bring about a great change in the world. Óður manages to pick this rose of roses at the right moment and returns to the North, where he presents the

magic flower to Freyja. The rose is clearly a symbol of love and learning in Gröndal's poem, and as the rose supplants Brísingamen, the old arch-symbol of the Nordic love goddess, this leads to a new age of love and learning in the far North. All this may sound rather simplistic, but, put up against the background of previous formulations of the relations between North and South in Icelandic Romanticism, Gröndal's *Brísingamen* reveals itself to be an important poem and indeed shows that the poet is really doing something new. I will mention a few relevant facts concerning this poem, for it is clearly written as a response to certain poems by Bjarni Thorarensen, on the one hand, and mythological poems by Adam Oehlenschläger on the other.

The prevailing poetic definition in nineteenth-century Iceland of the relations between North and South was that formulated in Bjarni Thorarensen's poems. Bjarni had put forward a climatic theory of sorts, which has been shown to be directly or indirectly derived from the ideas of Montesquieu, the French philosopher and jurist (Bjarni Guðnason 1969; see further Chapter 4.2 above). Montesquieu claimed that climate affected the national characters of peoples in different areas of the world. Bjarni Thorarensen, who besides being a poet was also a judge and later one of the heads of the Icelandic administration, adapted Montesquieu's views so that they made up the nucleus of his poetical ideology or philosophy of life. He compared the harsh nature of the North to the gentle nature of the South, and, contrary to what might be expected, came to the conclusion that it was quite a positive thing to live on the icy edge of the world, as the harsher nature and colder climate helped to build up character, health and prowess. Thus the northerly position of Iceland as an island in the middle of the North Atlantic — the landscape of the country, its many mountains, the frequent volcanic eruptions and the climate itself, the snow and frost — contributed to a character-building process from which the nation could benefit greatly. Had the position of the country been more southerly, had it enjoyed the warmth and bounty of the southern climate, the people would have lost their character altogether and become lazy and morally weak. It hardly comes as a surprise to discover that Bjarni proved to be a very strict courtroom judge; lenience, in his view, only lowered the moral standards of the people of the country.

It is against this ideological background that Gröndal's poem *Brísingamen* is written. Bjarni's ideology had been favourably received by other contemporary poets and scholars. Grímur Thomsen for one had developed a personal theory about the character of the people and literature of the Nordic countries that bore a clear resemblance to this poetic ideology. But instead of opposing the two hemispheres in a Northern versus Southern culture clash, as Bjarni and

Grímur had done earlier in the nineteenth century, Gröndal proposes that North and South have something to offer each other and need not be irreconcilable opposites, as the earlier poets had maintained. In a way, the North even proves itself the inheritor of classical values and learning in the poem, a point that is symbolically alluded to when the northern god Óður indirectly accepts the rose of love and learning from the hands of Apollo, thus ensuring that the cultural heritage of Greece will live on in the northern part of Europe.

Gröndal's epic *Brísingamen* can also be seen to have been written with one eye on Oehlenschläger's poetic cycle, *Nordens Guder* ('Gods of the North'), which had been published in 1819. This was a work that clearly showed the understanding — or lack of understanding — that Grundtvig so criticized in Oehlenschläger's mythological poetry. In *Nordens Guder*, Oehlenschläger described the world of the Old Norse gods as something of an idyll. His Óðinn and the other Nordic gods often resemble sanguine and laid-back country folk, pursuing amorous adventures that have no deeper significance, unlike the sexual intrigues and power politics in Old Norse mythology itself. Oehlenschläger's view of Old Norse mythology tends to be pastoral or idyllic, rather than tragic.

A small detail reveals the fact that Gröndal's *Brísingamen* was influenced by Oehlenschläger's *Nordens Guder*. Gröndal describes the chariot of Óður, Freyja's husband, as being pulled by *tigers* — of all animals (Gröndal 1906: 59)! This seems really bizarre, as tigers are highly unlikely animals in a Northern context, until one becomes aware of the fact that tigers are also said to pull the chariot of Óður in Oehlenschläger's *Nordens Guder* (Oehlenschläger 1819: 195–204). These animals enter Oehlenschläger's poem in a more natural if somewhat farfetched way, as Óður is said to have originally been a Bacchic god from India, an assertion which is offered by way of explanation for the presence of the tigers (for a further discussion of this, see Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 1999: 176–205).

Gröndal's *Brísingamen* can thus be shown to be a counter-poem of a kind, redefining the ideology of the North as it had been conceived of by earlier Icelandic Romantics, especially in the poems of Bjarni Thorarensen. But in melding together Northern and Southern elements, Old Norse and classical mythologies, Gröndal seems to have been influenced by Oehlenschläger's work. Although he did not share Oehlenschläger's pastoral and uncritical view of Old Norse mythology, the famous Dane's flawed work was an interesting example of how a poet could freely fuse together Northern and Southern elements of mythology. It also shows that poets were aware of the international and historical context of the mythology that Finnur Magnússon had popularized in his imaginative comparison of mythological material and motifs from various Indo-European religions and sources.

It should be added that Gröndal, a great humorist, also used Old Norse mythological material with far less serious purposes in mind. For instance, he wrote the Aristophanic farce *Gandreiðin* ('The Witch Ride') (1866), in which he depicts Óðinn, Þórr and other heathen deities as his contemporaries, putting them into the circumstances and troubling them with the concerns of Icelanders then living in Copenhagen, often to hilarious effect. Along the way, he finds time to criticize a few of his fellow-countrymen by means of various thinly veiled stand-ins, most of whom are derived from Old Norse sources. There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, as Napoleon Bonaparte famously said when retreating with his army from Russia, and Gröndal is keenly aware that this two-sidedness is inherent in the mythology itself, as was Grímur Thomsen and, indeed, those medieval authors and transmitters responsible for literary masterpieces ranging from the tragic grandeur of *Völuspá* to the grotesque flyting of *Lokasenna*. The last Romantic I will discuss here rewrote the old mythology on a still larger scale and made it mirror not only the local interests of the Icelanders living in Copenhagen, but also the political situation in continental Europe.

Gísli Brynjúlfsson

The scholar-poet Gísli Brynjúlfsson (1827–88) wrote articles and essays on contemporary political matters in Europe, and a number of his poems take their inspiration from European politics and contemporary history. The internationally minded Gísli — a way of thinking which made him suspect in the eyes of his more nationally minded fellow countrymen — was especially sympathetic to the plight of the Hungarians or Magyars, who, in the middle of the century, were fighting for their freedom from the Austrian Empire. At first, the Hungarians did very well in their battle against the Austrians and for a time seemed to be on the brink of gaining their longed-for independence. But then the Russians came to the aid of the Austrians, and soon the Hungarians were vanquished.

In Gísli Brynjúlfsson's writings on this subject, the Russians are often compared to the eastern trolls or giants that the god Þórr was busy beating up in Old Norse myths. Thus he translates the modern political landscape of Europe into the Nordic mythological world, often with striking effect. Gísli, a literary scholar and lecturer at the University of Copenhagen, gave a partly philological basis to his translation, citing in detail medieval sources for his creative combination or mirroring of Norse and European elements.

One example of this creative combination is his use of the name Atli in the poems he devoted to the Hungarian fight for freedom in 1848–49, the so-called *Magyaraljóð* ('Poems of the Magyars') (Gísli Brynjúlfsson 1891: 121–50; 2003: 111–30); he also wrote inspired articles on the Hungarian fight for freedom in his own journal *Norðurfari* (see Gísli Brynjúlfsson 1848 and 1849). Gísli is thinking of Attila the Hun, or Atli as he is called in eddic lays such as *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*. He argues that Atli or Attila was in fact an ancestor of the people now living in Hungary. He is very sympathetic towards Atli, even if Atli often plays the part of the villain in the old lays. It is a re-evaluation that can be compared to Grímur Thomsen's aforementioned re-evaluation of another medieval villain, Jarl Hákon of Hlaðir.

According to Gísli Brynjúlfsson, Atli may, surprisingly enough, be identical to the god Þórr. He points out the fact that Þórr is once or twice called Atli in the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (Gísli Brynjúlfsson 1891: 146). Furthermore, Attila the Hun seems to have considered himself to be the *malleus mundi* ('hammer of the world'), according to the Latin chronicle of the Hungarians (Gísli Brynjúlfsson 1891: 137). Gísli's argument is that this would assign him a role similar to that of Þórr in Old Norse mythology, guarding the world and holding the evil forces at bay with his hammer. The evil forces in Attila the Hun's case would be the Roman Empire, but the giants and trolls in Þórr's case.

I am not retracing Gísli Brynjúlfsson's argument because I think it is sound or plausible (for a further discussion, see Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 1999: 242–77). It does, however, provide an interesting example of the creative mixture of mythology and modern politics in the poems of the Icelandic scholar-poets of the nineteenth century. Gísli's identification of Attila the Hun with the god Þórr allows him to write poems which shed new light on the Hungarian fight for freedom by filtering it through the lens of Old Norse mythology. It also makes it possible for him to let this distant fight in Hungary reflect contemporary concerns for national freedom in Iceland. Gísli's argument is unconvincing philology but interesting poetry. In a way, it allegorizes the fight in Hungary, for it reflects both the Old Norse fight against evil forces in the East and, last but not least, it can be read as a comment on the contemporary Icelandic struggle for independence from the Danes.

An Icelandic historian, Aðalgeir Kristjánsson, has suggested that Gísli Brynjúlfsson's account of the contemporary struggle for freedom in Hungary might have affected the struggle for independence in Iceland (Aðalgeir Kristjánsson 1986: 125). According to this view, Gísli's powerful glorification of Lajos Kossuth (1802–94), the heroic leader of the Hungarians, might have convinced the Icelanders of the need for a strong political leader in their own

case and thus paved the way for Jón Sigurðsson (1811–79), who was soon to become the unchallenged leader of the Icelandic movement for independence. Whether Gísli Brynjúlfsson's writings did in fact have such an influence is difficult to know for certain, but there is no doubt that the poet himself intended his writings to be understood as a reflection of the Icelandic condition old and new, not just as a rhymed account of occurrences in a far-away country on the continent. His use of Old Norse mythology and literature in the poems on the freedom fight of the Hungarians was clearly meant to make the Icelanders sympathize with the cause of this oppressed nation and at the same time identify themselves with it.

Concluding Remarks

By looking at selected works by a number of nineteenth-century Icelandic poets, we have seen how the Romantic revival of Old Norse mythology is connected to both national and international issues. It plays a part in the definition and redefinition of the ideology of the North in the poetry of Bjarni Thorarensen, Grímur Thomsen and Benedikt Gröndal. In Gísli Brynjúlfsson's writings, Old Norse mythology is made to reflect contemporary European issues, whilst at the same time reflecting contemporary issues in Icelandic history and politics.

We can conclude that the revival or reinvention of Old Norse mythology played an important if limited part in Icelandic Romanticism. This is particularly true of the younger Romantics, especially Gröndal and Gísli, who base their poems on a more mythical outlook than their predecessors, such as Bjarni Thorarensen and Jónas Hallgrímsson. Even Romantic poets, who do not use Old Norse myths markedly in their own poetry, nevertheless show a general interest in it. A case in point is the poet Steingrímur Thorsteinsson (1831–1913) who, along with Kristian Arentzen, wrote a popular book on Old Norse myths (*Nordisk Mythologi efter kilderne*, 1859), which went into many reprints in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But there are clear indications that the Icelandic Romantics chose to revive Old Norse mythology for more than just enthusiastic or purely aesthetic reasons. They were certainly interested in Old Norse mythology as such, but they also made creative and political use of it in their works, thereby endowing the old myths with new resonance and new meaning in the national and international contexts of the nineteenth century.

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5.6 – English Romanticism and Norse Mythology

Heather O'Donoghue

In eighteenth-century England, an ever-increasing fascination with the sublime, especially as evidenced in so-called 'ancient poetry', began to develop. As a literary fashion, the sublime is recognized as a precursor to the Romantic movement in its emphasis on the imagination, grandeur, terror and the powerful emotions evoked by death, violence, wild landscapes or religious awe (on the sublime, see Chapter 4.3 above). Further, W. L. Phelps singles out 'a Reactionary spirit' as one of the key features of early Romantic literature (Phelps 1893: 3), exemplified in renewed appreciation of the poetry of the past. It is easy, then, to see how the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson and the *Poetic Edda* both met and advanced these tastes, and one might expect the influence of Old Norse poetry on the ensuing English Romantic movement to be both formative and dominant. But although eddic poetry played an important part in pre-Romantic thought and literature, the extent of explicit influence on the canonical poets of English Romanticism is surprisingly limited.

The influence of Thomas Gray and his 'Norse odes' persisted throughout the Romantic period, and authors continued to rely on Percy's translation of Mallet, *Northern Antiquities* (1770), when dealing with Old Norse themes. But the publication in 1787 by the Arnamagnæan Commission of the first volume of a dual language edition (Latin and Old Norse) of eddic poetry — the Copenhagen *Edda* (*Edda 1787–1828*) — gave a fresh impetus to the reception

Heather O'Donoghue is Professor of Old Norse at the University of Oxford, and a Fellow of Linacre College. Her publications include *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (2005) and *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (2014).

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of Old Norse poetry and myth. This volume, containing mythological poems, was translated by Amos Cottle, the brother of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's publisher Joseph Cottle, and close friend of Robert Southey, Coleridge's brother-in-law, who became Poet Laureate in 1813. Coleridge and Southey were also close friends and collaborators initially, although relations between them were to break down. Explicit debts to Old Norse in the work of this tightly knit circle must represent only the most obvious signs of influence.

Robert Southey's first published collection, *Poems: Containing The Retrospect, Odes, Elegies, Sonnets, etc.* (Lovell 1795), included two hectic poems on the subject of Odin: 'The Race of Odin' and 'The Death of Odin'. Both are based on the traditional euhemeristic interpretation of Odin as an historical chieftain who was deified by his credulous subjects, which dominated the depiction of Odin in England throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They are also heavily indebted to the Old Norse poem *Krákumál*, translated by Thomas Percy as 'The Dying Ode of Regner Lodbrog', which had been much quoted by antiquarians before Percy, and established the popular image of the death-defying Viking who welcomes death with defiant laughter. 'The Race of Odin' retells the story of Odin's flight northward from the east, and his descendants' return to defeat decadent Rome; it is packed with familiar 'Northern' motifs such as the ale 'quaffed' from foemen's skulls, the raven banner, and Goths in swarms (an image going back ultimately to Jordanes). In 'The Death of Odin' the same motifs are re-shuffled, and there are verbal echoes of Gray's 'The Fatal Sisters', as Coleridge acerbically notes in a letter to Southey (Griggs 1956–71: I, 116). Both poems also owe a great deal to *Northern Antiquities*.

Southey also wrote a poem to Amos Cottle that prefaces the latter's 1797 translation of the Poetic Edda (Cottle 1797: xxxi–xlii). Though written not long after the Odin poems, it relies much less on time-honoured Old Norse lore and raises some distinctively Romantic issues. Southey recalls a happy stay with Cottle in idyllic English countryside amongst the 'feathery fern' and its 'insect tribes' in typically Augustan language. But Southey imagines Cottle's mental landscape to be completely different: 'wildest scenes of strange sublimity' through which Cottle's 'Fancy roves' as he builds 'the Runic rhyme' — that is, his translations of the Copenhagen *Edda*. The *Edda* is represented as the basis of a religious system — 'A strange and savage faith | Of mightiest power' — and its adherents' attitudes are familiarly strange; they 'laugh'd in death' and quaffed mead in skulls. This 'wild [...] Runic faith' is set against a picturesquely wild landscape ('pine-cover'd rocks, | And mountain forests of eternal shade'). But Southey does not want to seek out these rugged parts; reading Cottle's translations is enough for him. He ponders how 'poets of distant years' naturally saw

God in the elements and in landscape, but is appalled by contemporary religion which propounds 'Prayers of a bloodier hate than ever rose | At Odin's altar'. Southey's early religious and political radicalism, which fostered his friendship with Coleridge, is clear here. As Margaret Omberg notes, the poem 'remains Southey's final poetical utterance on a specifically northern theme' (Omberg 1976: 131), though his *Lives of the British Admirals* (1833) also drew on Norse sources. But in 1798 he was optimistically fired by the prospect of 'a magnificent project, which I do not despair of one day completing [...]. My intention is to show off all the splendour of Mohammedan belief. I intend to do the same to the Runic, and oriental systems; to preserve the costume of place as well as of religion' (Cottle 1847: 218). Significantly, the plan is for a book about religion, not a poem.

According to Amos Cottle's publisher brother Joseph, Amos originally translated the *Poetic Edda* into prose, and it was on the advice of Robert Southey that this was redone as a verse translation — 'in the free manner of Gray's "Descent of Odin"' (Cottle 1837: 1, 110). Cottle's introduction is a brief *précis* of the preface to *Northern Antiquities*. He also omits three poems from his *Edda*: following the Copenhagen volume, he does not include *Völuspá* or *Hávamál*, and on his own account he dismisses *Sólarljóð*, a strange and difficult Old Norse vision of an apparently Christian afterlife, as being 'filled with little else but the absurd superstitions of the Church of Rome' (Cottle 1797: xxix–xxx).

Cottle's translation of the *Edda* was memorably mocked by William Herbert, the first English translator of Old Norse poetry to have engaged with the texts in the original language. Herbert sneered that had Cottle claimed the poems as his own compositions, he 'could scarce have been accused of plagiarism' (Herbert 1804: 46; see also 9–11), and introducing his own rival translation of *Vafþrúðnismál*, William Taylor dismissed Cottle's *Edda* as 'a rimed paraphrase' which 'departs widely from the text' (Taylor 1798: 451). But in fact there are surprisingly few inaccuracies (we should remember that Cottle was an undergraduate at the time), and sometimes Cottle perceptively and plausibly interprets what the original poems leave unsaid, anticipating the speculations of modern scholars. Margaret Clunies Ross argues that early Romantic poets were inspired by Cottle's work, perhaps finding more literal, scholarly versions less exciting (Clunies Ross 1998: 236). But the great names in English Romantic poetry — Wordsworth, Keats, Byron and Shelley — did not adopt Old Norse themes. And Coleridge only barely did so.

Coleridge passed Cottle's *Edda* on to Wordsworth, who expressed some enthusiasm — 'The volume has afforded me considerable pleasure' — but joined in the criticism of Cottle as a translator — 'there are many inaccuracies which

ought to have been avoided' (de Selincourt and Shaver 1967: 196). However, apart from an uncompleted ghostly lyric, 'The Danish Boy' (Hutchinson 1936: 131), and a reference to the euhemerized Odin in *The Prelude* (bk 1, ll. 186–90), Wordsworth has not left any trace of Norse-derived work. Coleridge had great plans to write an epic on the subject of Þórr's encounter with the Miðgarðsormr, as is evident from a note written in 1796: 'Poem in one Books [*sic*] in the manner of Dante on the excursion of Thor' (Coburn 1957: entry 170). The emendation of 'three' to 'one' is telling, and in fact nothing was written. In a letter to Southey written in the same year Coleridge imagines that it would take him twenty years to write a decent epic poem, so it is perhaps no wonder that he put it off (Cottle 1847: 103).

Coleridge wrote two short prose pieces on Norse subjects, the second apparently the opening to an unfinished poem. The first piece brings us back to Robert Southey. Southey and Coleridge collaborated on a series of historical lectures that were delivered by Southey early in 1795. The sixth of these lectures was entitled 'Manners and Irruptions of the Northern Nations', and it seems that this lecture was virtually the same as a piece published in *The Watchman* in March 1796, under Coleridge's name. Lewis Patton discusses the authorship of the article (Patton 1970: 89) and attributes the piece, with its new title 'Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the Ancient Germans, Introductory to a Sketch of the Manners, Religion and Politics of present Germany', to Coleridge. The 'Historical Sketch', like Cottle's Introduction to his *Edda*, is largely derived from *Northern Antiquities*. It begins with the usual account of how the Germanic tribes overcame the decadent Roman Empire (though not from *Northern Antiquities*, and echoed almost word for word by Cottle in his introduction), and then continues, dense with close verbal echoes of Percy's translation, to describe the political organization of the early Germans. Radically rearranging his source and omitting great stretches of material about the Old Norse pantheon, or accounts of Scandinavian seafaring such as the Vinland voyages, Coleridge describes the regard in which Germanic women were supposedly held. Plainly more engaged by the topical implications than the antiquarian knowledge, Coleridge departs from Percy and takes issue with Gibbon's claim that that early Germanic women must have been 'neither lovely, nor very susceptible of love'. Coleridge makes fierce riposte to this idea, quotes Mary Woolstonecraft, and praises a social order in which women 'were the free and equal companions of their husbands' (Patton 1970: 90–91; see Gibbon 1776: 233).

Coleridge echoes the account in *Northern Antiquities* of 'the Eternal Being' of the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* and describes the corruption of this creed after

the deification of Odin; a brief account of the euhemerized Odin follows. Thus, Coleridge concludes, Norse mythology (as he knew it) with its Valhalla, its skull mead cups and Odin as 'the father of Slaughter', is a degenerate version of the natural religion of the early Germans. Coleridge draws a clear distinction between the admirable aspects of the early Germans and the more extravagant subjects of Old Norse myth, which contemporary reviewers had in fact often dismissed as inimical to poetry: in the words of one reviewer, 'Scandinavian mythology is little adapted to the purposes of modern poetry. The images that it exhibits are for the most part incomprehensibly wild and uncouth' (see Tucker 1962–65: 241–42).

Coleridge's second piece of prose on an Old Norse theme is an extraordinary short piece about the medieval Icelandic scholar Sæmundr inn fróði 'Saemund the Wise' (Jackson and Jackson 1995: 66–68).[1] Sæmundr was cited in medieval Icelandic texts as an authority on historical matters, and as the author of historical works, but hardly anything written by him survives. Most famously, the eddic poems of the Codex Regius were attributed to him, and the anthology became known as the *Sæmundar Edda* — hence the full title of the Copenhagen *Edda*, *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda*. Coleridge borrowed a volume cited as 'Sæmundi Edda' from the Bristol Public Library from December 1797 to January 1798, but it is not certain whether this refers to the Copenhagen *Edda* or to Cottle's translation (see Clunies Ross 1998: 182). Cottle's account of Sæmundr in his Introduction is a greatly abridged translation of a Latin biography of him by Árni Magnússon prefacing the Copenhagen *Edda* (see Chapter 3.2 for a discussion of this piece), but since Coleridge includes even fewer details about Sæmundr's life and supposed works than Cottle does, it is hard to tell which was his source. Coleridge's use of the authentic post-medieval Icelandic form of his subject's name — Sæmundur — not Cottle's form, is intriguing.

The manuscript of Coleridge's piece on Sæmundr shows a good deal of revision and crossing out, indicating that he was not closely following a source without alteration, but composing as he went along. Key passages in Cottle's introduction could have formed the basis of Coleridge's piece; that Sæmundr as a boy had travelled abroad, and spent time in Rome; that he was called 'the ornament and support of the Icelandic church' (Cottle 1797: xviii), and that he was moved to 'rescue the antiquities of his country from oblivion' (Cottle

[1] On Sæmundr and the rediscovery of the Poetic Edda, as well as the biography of Sæmundr by Árni Magnússon that was the basis for Coleridge's prose, see Chapter 3.2 above.

1797: xix). Coleridge develops these points to depict a devout Christian who nevertheless saw a need to 'rescue' (Cottle's word) pre-Christian material ('Runic lays') because they might serve as 'spiritual nourishment' for Icelanders since 'the blood of their Ancestors flowed still in their veins' — a significant prefiguring of later German nationalist praise of the *Edda* as embodying the wisdom and the 'race soul' of early Germanic peoples.

Coleridge imagines a scene in Sæmundr's chamber, a goblet of mead on the table and the red glow of Hekla visible outside. Sæmundr is being pressed by admiring acolytes to recite his runic lays, but his favourite pupil requests something different: an account of Sæmundr's travels in the south, for as he puts it, 'We men of the North listen gladly to one who tells us of the fair southern Lands, where all the most luscious Fruits are said to bloom', and so on. This is almost an allegory of the southward turn taken by the Romantic poets. An associated scribble from Coleridge proposes 'an Idea for a Poem' and offers a few opening lines, beginning 'Scald by the northern sea in ocean Cave' but tellingly petering out on two notes: 'Genius of Italy' and the name Boccaccio (Jackson and Jackson 1995: 68).

Margaret Clunies Ross has suggested that there may be 'muted echoes' of Cottle's translation of the *Edda* in the poetry Coleridge was working on in 1797: the first part of *Christabel; The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; and the fragment *Kubla Khan* (Clunies Ross 1998: 168). For example, Lowes has drawn attention to similarities in phrasing between a footnote in Cottle's *Edda* and a line from 'The Rime' (Lowes 1959: 188), and Kubla Kahn's 'stately pleasure-dome' may owe something to the use of 'dome' in Cottle's translation of *Vafþrúðnismál* to designate the giant's hall. But echoes of Gray's poetry are much more evident in Coleridge's work — for example, in the dramatic letter describing the effects of laudanum on the 'shower of arrowy death pangs' he was suffering (Coleridge 1895: 174; see Gray's *The Fatal Sisters*). And for Coleridge, contemporary concerns trumped antiquarian endeavours. *The Rime*, for example, though based on the ballads collected by Percy, has been described as 'not antiquarian', but rather as a vehicle for articulating contemporary political issues (Fulford 2002: 53).

If explicit allusions to Old Norse themes or texts in Coleridge's poetry are disappointingly sparse, a distinctive blend of strangeness and familiarity — noted for instance in the language of Coleridge's supernatural poems with their old-fashioned diction alongside common speech (Fulford 2002, 53) — has been recognized as a characteristic feature of Norse-derived poetry more generally (O'Donoghue 2014: 71–72). The process of translating Latin translations of

Old Norse poetry into English might very well have had the effect of purging the resulting texts of high-flown poetic diction. Gray, for instance, who according to Samuel Johnson, used 'language [...] unlike the language of other poets' (Johnson 2010: 1470) perhaps anticipates the use of what Wordsworth and Coleridge describe in their preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798 as 'the language of conversation' (Wordsworth and Coleridge 1963: 7) — remembering too that eddic poetry is very largely expressed as monologue or dialogue. Coleridge's debt to Old Norse poetry, and its wider influence on the English Romantic movement, may thus be better seen in the advancement of a new kind of poetic diction and the opening up of poetry to more fantastic subjects, even if such subjects may have proved a step too far for other Romantic poets.

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5.7 – The 'Nordic Renaissance' in Russia and Poland

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

Since Anton Blanck's work *Den nordiska renässansen i sjuttonhundratalets litteratur* ('The Nordic Renaissance in Eighteenth-Century Literature') of 1911, the 'Nordic Renaissance' of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been regarded as a phenomenon of European literary history which deserves consideration in a comparative perspective. However, too little attention has been paid in this context to the fact that it was not only the cultures of Western Europe — in Scandinavia, Great Britain, the German-speaking countries and France — which participated in this trend, but also Russia and Poland.[1] The Polish and Russian interest, like the German, Danish and English ones, is first of all evidenced by the existence of Russian and Polish translations of Paul Henri Mallet's influential French account of Nordic prehistory, first published in 1755–56.[2] In both countries, particular attention was given beyond this to Nordic antiquity, its religion and its poetry. This is expressed for example through translations of eddic and skaldic poems and through liter-

[1] However, the works of Maria Janion are an exception to this. As most of them were published in Polish, they have received little attention outside of Poland.

[2] On Mallet and his influence on the 'Nordic Renaissance' in Europe, see Chapter 4.5 in this volume. The editions and translations of Mallet's work relevant to the present essay can be found in the references list there.

Julia Zernack is Professor of Scandinavian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. She works on Old Norse literature, its post-medieval reception, the history of Old Norse Studies and modern Scandinavian literature.

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ary borrowings from Norse mythology. In Polish Romanticism this even culminates in a programmatic *poezja północy* (Chojnacki 1998), a 'poetry of the North', in Polish. This shows a number of points of contact with the manifold fantasies of the North which were spawned by the Romantic imagination in several European countries, such as the 'Norse Romanticism' in Great Britain (see Chapters 5.6 and 6.2.5; also Janion 1984, Cieselski 1991, Kamionka-Straszak 1991). As in many other cultures, one can see a second, modernist turn towards the North in Poland and Russia at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, which, however, only rarely still draws on Old Norse mythology and religion (see however Bergmann 1995; Nilsson 1987). As elsewhere in Europe, the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century interest shown in both countries in the tradition, religion, history and culture of prehistoric Scandinavia is closely tied to issues of cultural belonging and national identity.

Russia

The background to the 'Nordic renaissance' in Russia is provided by an argument which had been raging for many decades since the eighteenth century about the conditions of the emergence of the first Russian state in the so-called Kievan Rus'. If one believes the medieval tradition of *Povest' vremmenych let*, the so-called *Primary Chronicle* from the first half of the twelfth century, in 862 the Slavic and Finnish tribes living in the area of Lake Lagoda and Lake Ilmen summoned rulers from among the Varangians (called Rus'), a people living 'across the sea' to the North, in order to establish a just and orderly society. The most important of these rulers was Rurik, who is reputed to have founded the first ruling dynasty of the Eastern Slavs, the Rurikids, and to have given the land its name (see also Chapter 1.5 in the present volume). This legend of summoning has caused problems of interpretation up to the present day (Schramm 2002). However, when scholarly research into the *Primary Chronicle* began in the eighteenth century, its reliability as a historical source was unquestioned, and therefore many scholars thought that Russia shared a common early history with Scandinavia. This view dominated one of the positions in the notorious 'Normanist' controversy about the ethnic affiliation of the Varangians and their importance for the beginnings of Russian history (Scholz 2000) and inspired curiosity in the cultural legacy of pre-Christian Scandinavia in some Russian intellectuals (Pochljobkin 1962: 92–93).

Under the enlightened rule of Tsarina Catherine II (1762–96), these intellectuals obtained their knowledge of Scandinavian antiquity from Mallet's history of the Danish Empire, published for the first time in 1755–56. The

relevant volumes, *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* and the supplementary *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes*, appeared in Russian translation in 1785.[3] At about the same time, Ossianism also spread to Russia (Levin 1980), where it remained potent into the nineteenth century and received a patriotic colouring, particularly during the war against Napoleon. Macpherson's Ossian poems appeared to many Russians to embody a typically 'Nordic' culture, and as inhabitants of Northern landscapes with a specifically Northern environment and climate, they felt that they were able to appropriate this culture for themselves and even utilize it in the construction of a Russian national culture. Initially, the monuments of Old Russian literature, which were discovered around 1800, among them the so-called 'Song of Igor' (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*), were considered in precisely the same context. Even before this, Mallet's 'Celtic' interpretation of Scandinavian prehistory had inspired the connection of ancient Scandinavian traditions to Ossian's compositions.[4] Thus, the early constructs of Russian antiquity show a characteristic amalgamation of Nordic and Old Norse, Ossianic-Celtic, Slavic and Finnish motifs.[5]

It appears significant that Russian interest at first focused on one of the poems in Mallet's *Monumens*, namely the so-called *Gamanvísur* 'Jesting Verses' (Mallet 1756: 156–58), with the title *Ode de Harald Le Vaillant* 'Ode of Harald the Brave'. Since 1778–79 the *Gamanvísur* had also been available in German translation in Herder's *Volkslieder* ('Folk-Songs') which were well known in Russia. Six stanzas of this somewhat unusual skaldic poem are preserved in *Morkinskinna*.[6] They are ascribed to the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði (Haraldr III, *c.* 1015–66), who is said to have composed them on his return journey from Byzantium to Russia in 1043 or 1044. In these stanzas, he recounts his heroic deeds and abilities in order to impress the Russian princess Ellisif (Elizabeth, b. *c.* 1025), a daughter of Jaroslav the Wise (d. 1054).

[3] The translator was Fedor Petrovič Moisenko (1754–81), whose name also appears as Moiseenko or Moiseenkov. His translation was regarded as not particularly successful, so that the French original was usually preferred (Šarypkin 1980: 93–94; 1972: 101–02). Mallet was also well known as a person in Russia; Tsarina Catherine II allegedly tried unsuccessfully to recruit him as tutor for the future Grand Prince (Stadler 1924: 129).

[4] For more details, see Chapter 4.5.

[5] Šarypkin 1972: 110–19; on the Russian reception of Finnish motifs, see Kiparsky 1947.

[6] Mallet thought that the *Gamanvísur* derived from *Knýtlinga saga*. He got this erroneous assumption from Thomas Bartholin's *Antiquitatum danicarum* (1689: 154), whose Latin translation of the poem he followed (as did Herder). Details on the transmission and the most recent edition can be found in *SkP* II.1: 35–41.

Haraldr ended up marrying her before his return to Norway in 1045, even if she refused him at first, as the refrain of the *Gamanvísur* claims. Thus the poem could be viewed as a direct piece of evidence of the connection between Russian and Scandinavian history. Subsequently, no fewer than nine Russian language versions, based on Mallet's French translation, appeared between 1778 and 1869.[7] They show a characteristically Russian perspective on the Old Norse poem, which is brought closer to Slavic or Russian poetry in several ways. Thus the translator Nikolaj L'vov (1753–1803) — a versatile artist who had become famous primarily as an architect and who had a great interest in the revival of traditional Russian folk-songs — uses the formal frame of a Russian folk-song for the text,[8] while Pavel L'vov (1770–1825), a representative of Sentimentalism, opened his 1803 collection *Slavjanskie pesni* ('Slavic Songs') with his own translation of the poem which had originally appeared two years earlier. This collection in turn was published in a work celebrating the glory of Russian heroes (*Chram Slavy Rossijskich Iroev*, 1803).

As the example of this work shows, the faith of old Russia prior to its conversion to Christianity in 988 was imagined as a kind of syncretistic religion consisting of Varangian and Slavic elements. Aspects of Norse mythology, in particular Odin, Valhalla and the valkyries, were used to paint a heroic picture of this early era in Russian history (Šarypkin 1972: 108–09). The idea of the 'glad death' of the ancient Scandinavians appears to have been particularly

[7] The first Russian translation (in prose) appears in an anonymous review of Mallet's work in the *Sankt-Peterburgskij vestnik* from 1778 (the review 308–14, the translation of the *Gamanvísur* 312–14), probably by Grigorij L. Brajko (1740–93); see Šarypkin 1980: 94–95. A Russian translation of Mallet's *Monumens* followed in 1785 (the *Gamanvísur* under the title *Pesnja Garal'da bodrago*, 169–70). Nikolaj A. L'vov's translation (*Pesn' norvežgskogo vitjasja Garal'da Chrabrogo*) appeared in 1793. Shortly afterwards, Ippolit F. Bogdanovič (1743–1803) composed a metrical version which was published in 1810. The anonymous translation published in the journal *Ippokrena* in 1801 can be traced back to the poet Pavel Ju. L'vov. A freer translation by the Romantic poet Konstantin N. Batjuškov (1787–1855) appeared in 1816; this has been lauded as the most 'talented' of all Russian *Gamanvísur* translations (Šarypkin 1980: 133; Kiparsky 1947: 25–26). Another prose version can be found in Karamzin's *Istorija gosudarstva rossijskogo* of 1818 (1988, II, col. 19, n. 41); another anonymous verse translation is in the *Moskovskij Telegraf* in 1825 (no. 2: 225–26). The 1869 ballad *Pesnja o Garal'de i Jaroslavne* ('Song of Harald and Jaroslavna') by Aleksej K. Tolstoj (1817–75) should not be counted among the direct translations, even though it undoubtedly refers to the *Gamanvísur*. Translations on the basis of the Old Norse text only appeared in the twentieth century.

[8] A method previously employed by many Russian translators of Ossian. L'vov himself names the folk-song *Ne zvezda blestit daleče vo čistom pole* ('It Is Not a Star That Shines Yonder over the Open Field') as his metrical model.

attractive to Russians in the same way as it was to other Europeans. This is shown for example by the three Russian versions of *Krákumál*, 'The Speeches of Kráka (*or*, "the Crow")', the death song of the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók, which appeared in quick succession in 1795, 1796 and 1801. This poem was likewise popular in many countries in early Romantic Europe. Furthermore, the Slavic heroes celebrated in pre-Romantic literature (for example, in Michail Murav'ev's fragmentary tale *Osko'ld* from 1810) look forward to life in Odin's hall, an aspect that only seems surprising at first sight. They are accompanied by skalds, warrior-poets who sing to them about victory in battle, and are frequently equated with the Ossianic bards. Like Mallet's ancient Scandinavians, the Slavic heroes exhibit a pronounced gallantry (Boele 1996: 37–38).

Two early Romantic poets, in whose work the interest in Nordic subjects becomes obvious, are Gavriil R. Deržavin (1743–1816), who is regarded as one of the most important poets in the era of Catherine II, and Nikolaj M. Karamzin (1766–1826), the founder of Russian Sentimentalism. In his gothic tale *Ostrov Borngol'm* ('Bornholm Island') Karamzin, who was also interested in the early 'Scandinavian' history of Russia from a historian's point of view, made use of supposed memories of Norse paganism — featuring druids(!), idolatry and blood sacrifices — to flesh out the eerie scenery which he placed in the sublime Nordic natural environment of Bornholm. To him, this island in the Baltic Sea, which supposedly contained pagan places of worship until far into the Middle Ages, was, together with Rügen, a paradigmatic place of the Varangian-Slavic past (Šarypkin 1972: 128–29). Deržavin, however, related his perception of the Varangian-Russian (*varjagorusskij*) mythology to the present. In an allegorical ballad he described Catherine's castle Gatčina, south of St Petersburg, as the home of the goddess Frigg, inhabited by characters from Norse mythology, among them the gods Bragi, Odin and Loki (*Žilišče bogini Frigi*, 'The Dwellings of the Goddess Frigg' (1812)). His ode to the victories won by the Russian general Aleksandr V. Suvorov (1730–1800) against the French in the War of the Second Coalition shows a stronger Ossianic colouring (*Na pobedy v Italii*, 'On Victories in Italy', 1799). The poem gathers bards, heroes, harps and burning oaks together in a misty landscape and includes references to Valhalla and shield-maidens called 'Valki' who can be easily identified as valkyries. In this way, Deržavin seems to have made his mark among his contemporaries as the 'skald of the Slavs' who was infused with the spirit of poetry by the god Bragi, as a certain Nikolaj Gramatin says in a poem on Deržavin's death (*Na Smert' Deržavina*, 1817; see Šarypkin 1972: 119–24). The term 'Valki' for valkyries is, however, already found in one of Catherine II's historical dramas, which treats Rurik's life: *Istoričeskoe predstavlenie iz žizni*

Rjurika ('A Historical Drama from the Life of Rurik', 1786). Here the Valki are associated with both the Slavic god Perun and the Norse Odin (Ekaterina II 1901: 222). Catherine's interest in Norse mythology would probably have been primarily of a genealogical nature, because the dynasty of the Tsars traced their descent not only to Rurik and the Rurikids but also further back to their divine ancestor Odin (Šarypkin 1972: 118; Bergmann 1995: 428).

It is not only the echo produced by Mallet or by Ossianism which shows that the 'Nordic Renaissance' in Western Europe was closely followed in Russia. The impactful *Norse Odes* (1768) by the British poet Thomas Gray — adaptations of the Old Norse poems *Baldrs draumar* ('The Descent of Odin') and *Darraðarljóð* ('The Fatal Sisters') — had a significant influence even before their translation into Russian in 1803: in 1799, Pavel L'vov adapted the same poems into Russian prose, based on Gray's Latin models.[9]

Even if further examples could be found, it needs to be stated that on the whole the attention paid by Russian poets of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the pre-Christian culture and religions of the North was little more than a fringe phenomenon. Karamzin's *Bornholm Island* is characteristic in this regard, since it treats Norse paganism as a distant memory, evoked by the melancholy of the Ossianic-Nordic landscape. This holds even more for the ideas of the North — and Russia as part of the North — imagined by the Russian Romanticists (Boele 1996). There are rarely any references to anything Old Norse; the Norse-Varangian past — in whichever way one might have wanted to construe it — did not play a role in the works of the great Romantic authors like Aleksandr Puškin (1799–1837) or Michail Lermontov (1814–41). At least Anton Del'vig (1798–1831), a friend of Puškin's, borrows eschatological images from *Völuspá* as transmitted in Mallet's French version and from Pavel L'vov's translation of *Baldrs draumar* in order to mythicize the burning of Moscow in 1812 as an event of world historical significance (Šarypkin 1980: 141).

From an ideological point of view, the Russian interest in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion and poetry was part of the formation of a national consciousness, which grappled with the question of whether the Russian nation belonged to the European West or the orthodox European (or indeed the Asian) East. In this context, the focus on the North, which in the first decades of the nineteenth century positively turned into borealimania (Boele 1996: 43; see also Mal'čukova 2012) and which on the whole drew on Russia's 'Nordic'

[9] The *Norse Odes* had been translated by Pavel Goleniščev-Kutuzov (1803). L'vov (1799a and 1799b) made use of Bartholin (1689) and Torfaeus (1697).

nature rather than Old Norse culture, offered a way to allow Russia to belong to Europe while at the same time distancing it from the West, in particular from France. This symbolic look to the North is above all a phenomenon of St Petersburg and one aspect of Russia's programmatic turn towards the West since the time of Peter the Great (1672–1725).

Poland

Unlike Russians or indeed Britons, Poles cannot claim a direct Scandinavian participation in their early history. However, claims have occasionally been made in Polish historiography that Germanic tribes might have played a role in the formation of the Polish state. Gothicizing tendencies can be found in the sixteenth century (Schmidt-Voges 2004: 57–58); and in the nineteenth century the historian Tadeusz Czacki (1765–1813) assumed Scandinavian influence on the development of Polish laws (*O litewskich i polskich prawach*, 'On Lithuanian and Polish laws', 1800). Karol Szajnocha (1818–68) connected the beginnings of the Polish state with conquering expeditions by the West Slavic Lechites, who allegedly derived from the Varangians (*Lechicki początek Polski*, 'Lechitic Origins of Poland', 1858). The reason for such speculation was the fact that there are almost no sources for the prehistory of Polish state formation in the tenth century and that the origin of the tribes united under Polish rule is difficult to reconstruct. With an eye on the formation of Kievan Rus', a Scandinavian or Viking influence on Polish state formation appeared plausible to some Polish historians and writers, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, as did a Viking ancestry for the Piast dynasty, the first Polish ruling house (Wajsblum 1971: 32–33).

The ethnographical uncertainties of the dawn of Slavic-Baltic history also induced the founder of modern Polish historiography, Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861), to turn towards the history of the North, even if he sought the origins of Polish history not there but rather in a freedom-loving Slavic folk identity (Baár 2010: 174–77). In 1807, while still a student, he anonymously published a short paraphrase of Mallet's French translation of the Edda from the *Monumens* under the title *Edda czyli Księga religii dawnych Skandynawii mieszkańców* ('Edda, or A Book about the Religion of the Ancient Inhabitants of Scandinavia'). Like Mallet, he prefaced the translation with an introductory essay about the ethnography of the North. He shows particular interest in the dispersal of the Scythian peoples across Europe, among whom he — like Mallet and other historians of the eighteenth century — numbered the Scandinavians. Despite the brevity of his remarks, his work clearly also shows familiarity with

Mallet's *Introduction*. Lelewel rejects Mallet's equation of the Scythians with the Celts and emphasizes the differences between the various Scythian peoples. However, he follows Mallet's enlightened deist view that remnants of original Scythian monotheism can be found among all these peoples. The only written reflex of this was the eddic tradition (*Edda czyli Księga*: 15–17), whose content he goes on to summarize briefly in thirty-eight pages, thus making it accessible in Polish for the first time (Schlauch 1968: 59–60).

From the 1820s, though with a certain delay, this made an impact on the Romantic poets of Poland (Kamionska-Straszak 1991) and in this context Lelewel published a completely revised edition of *Edda czyli Księga religii dawnych Skandynawii mieszkańców* in 1828. He now had access to much more extensive material; apart from the third edition of Mallet (1787), he also used the first two volumes of the Arnamagnean edition of the Poetic Edda (1787 and 1818) with their Latin translations as well as German translations by Friedrich David Gräter (1768–1830) and Friedrich Majer (1772–1818). Lelewel aimed at a comprehensive reproduction of the contents of the eddic texts. The translations are once again accompanied by an essay in which Lelewel discusses the religions of the ancient Scandinavians and reports the growing knowledge of their mythology across Europe on the basis of Rasmus Nyerup's *Übersicht der Geschichte des Studiums der skandinavischen Mythologie* ('Survey of the History of the Study of Scandinavian Mythology') (1816).

While Lelewel himself translated eddic poems into Polish prose, he also reproduced the poet Kazimierz Brodziński's (1791–1835) metrical translations of *Skírnismál* and *Þrymskviða* (see Schlauch 1959, 1968). One might therefore assume that Lelewel's revised translation was motivated not least by the increase in aesthetic-literary attention paid to the legends and myths of the eddic poems. Indeed, Brodziński had already discussed the specific Romantic potential of Old Norse poetry in 1818. Like the Early Romantics in other countries, he talked about it in the same breath as the Ossian poems (Brodziński 1856: 27). The immediate context for his remarks was an aesthetic debate about the position of Polish poetry between Classicism and Romanticism which was an outcome of the struggle to give Polish national literature an independent profile, under the influence of Germaine de Staël (1766–1817) and German Romanticism. Brodziński, for whom Nordic antiquity was only one of many cultural references for national poetry in Poland, was not the only one to bring the aesthetics of Old Norse tradition to bear on the debate. The program of literary reformation formulated a few years later by the poet Maurycy Mochnacki (1803–34) in *O duchu i źródłach poezyi w Polszcze* ('On the Spirit and the Sources of Poetry in Poland') (1825) was more radical. According to this, Polish

Romantic poetry should not be based on classical models but on a triad consisting of Slavic antiquity, Norse mythology and the spirit of the Middle Ages (*starożytność sławiańska, Mytologia północy, i duch średnich wieków*: Mochnacki 1910 [1825]: 12). In a very similar way to Herder in Germany or Adam Oehlenschläger in Denmark, and obviously influenced by Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1892), Mochnacki was fascinated by the wild and dark imagination which to him appeared to be characteristic of the Scandinavian peoples. There he found *nieokrzesane fikcye i grube pomysty* ('fresh fictions and raw ideas') and *olbrzymie marzenia geniuszu pótnocy* ('gigantic dreams of Northern genius') which could only be of benefit to Polish poetry (Mochnacki 1910 [1825]: 21; see Schröder 1953: 30–50). Of course, his demands mostly met with rejection. Besides Brodziński (1964: 134, 310), Lelewel also polemicized against the idea that Norse mythology could be useful for Polish national poetry and replace classical models: where Mochnacki looked for strong images for the enrichment of the poetic imagination, Lelewel saw nothing but incomprehensible names and linguistic foreignness. From this he drew the conclusion that the basis for a national poetry could only be a mythology developed from the nation's own language (Lelewel 1865: 139; see Janion 1988: 101).

However, this was not a possible path for Romantic authors, due to the meagre tradition of Slavic mythology. In their attempts to paint a picture of Slavic antiquity, they — or at least the dramatists Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–59) — had recourse to Norse mythological motifs in the historical dramas *Balladyna* (1839), *Lilla Weneda* (1840) and *Irydion* (1836), not of course without fundamentally transforming them. It has been observed repeatedly that Słowacki in particular was inspired to create his own mythology by his reading of the Edda (Schlauch 1960; Dominik-Stawicka 2006; Majewska 2013; Janion 1988: 102–04).

Conclusion

The increase in attention paid to Old Norse mythology and poetry which can be observed in Russia and Poland in the decades around the turn of the nineteenth century stands in the context of the common contemporary endeavour to construct national mythologies, in this case a Slavic one (Neuhäuser 1974: 138). This interest in Old Norse tradition combined with cultural geographic ideas in which North and South were regarded as opposite zones in continuation of the classical world-view and were imbued with cultural relevance to the point of these Romantic endeavours representing the North as a Romantic space for yearning and imagination. According to this model, the

North consisted of all peoples who had remained outside the Roman Empire's sphere of influence and could not trace their culture back to the inheritance of classical antiquity. This included the Slavs, who in the nineteenth century were often regarded as a Northern people (Pynsent 1994: 76). In this context, early Slavic history appeared to be connected to the antiquity of those freedom-loving Northern nations (Baár 2010: 176) whose culture and history Mallet had foregrounded as an expression of Montesquieu's concept of freedom (see Chapter 4.2 above). This also made the North attractive for nineteenth-century revolutionaries as a space onto which to project their ideas, such as the Decembrists in Russia (Pochljobkin 1962: 94–96; Dmochovskaja 1964: 178–79) and the Polish intellectuals who participated in the 1830–31 revolt against Russian rule. However, Old Norse religion and mythology did not play a large role in this. Only the skalds, esteemed as poets and heroic warriors in one, offered themselves as role models, particularly for those poets who fought for Polish independence (Ciesielski 1991: 200). All of these points of contact between Slavic culture and the history of the North however soon lost their persuasive power. Already in the nineteenth century they gave way to the cultural geographical identification of the Slavs with Eastern Europe (Lemberg 1985), which continues today.

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5.8 – The International Reception of a Seminal Work: *Baldrs draumar*

Julia Zernack
Translated from the German by Matthias Ammon

When the remains of Old Norse literature became known internationally in the eighteenth century, this pertained in the first instance to a rather randomly selected 'canon' of Old Norse poems (Heinrichs 1991). Two of them exerted a particular fascination on the artistic imagination of the time: Ragnar's Death Song, that is the skaldic poem *Krákumál* ('Kráka's Song' or 'Speeches of the Crow'), and the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar* ('Baldr's Dreams'). Both poems belong to a younger layer of Old Norse poetry and were probably not composed before the twelfth century. For a long time, however, they were considered to be very ancient and were perceived as authentic witnesses to the pre-Christian culture of Northern Europe. While *Krákumál* quickly became the model for the stereotypical images of Vikings that persist until the present day (see, for example, Meissner 1923; Boyer 1972; Clunies Ross 1998: 229–36), *Baldrs draumar* appealed particularly to the thematic and aesthetic predilections of the incipient Romantic period. At this time, the poem was translated and adapted more than almost any other eddic poem — into Latin, English, German, Danish, Russian, Swedish and French. Some of these adaptations in turn influenced the visual arts, which in the early Romantic period attempted the visual representation of Old Norse myths for the first time, using scenes and motifs from *Baldrs draumar* (see Part 6 below). Evidence of this strong attraction of *Baldrs draumar* can be found until the

Julia Zernack is Professor of Scandinavian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. She works on Old Norse literature, its post-medieval reception, the history of Old Norse Studies and modern Scandinavian literature.

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early nineteenth century. After this time, the interest wanes quickly, thus proving that *Baldrs draumar* had a very period-specific appeal.

In fourteen stanzas of *fornyrðislag* metre, *Baldrs draumar* tells the story of Odin's visit to Hel's realm of the dead. Disconcerted by his son Baldr's bad dreams, he assumes the disguise of a certain Vegtamr ('Way-Familiar'), awakens the Völva — a seeress — from her grave and demands information about Baldr's fate. The Völva reluctantly foretells Baldr's death and names his avenger. Eventually she recognizes the true identity of her visitor and sends him away with prophetic invocations of *ragnarök*.

There is only one medieval witness to the poem, in AM 748 I, 4to, the sister manuscript of the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda. In addition, there are a number of modern paper manuscripts from the seventeenth century onwards, in which the medieval poem is expanded through textual additions (on these see Chapter 3.2). Four later stanzas are inserted between the first two stanzas, and individual lines are added to stanzas 3, 4 and 12 (edited by Bugge 1867: 138–39). The paper manuscripts do not use the medieval title *Baldrs draumar*; they call the poem *Vegtamskviða* ('Vegtam's Poem'). Under this title it became well-known outside Iceland in the modern period. Outside Iceland, the poem had been accessible in print since 1689 when it had been published in the Danish scholar Thomas Bartholin the Younger's (1659–90) influential treatise *Antiquitatum Danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres* ('Three Books on Danish Antiquities and the Reasons for the Danes' Contempt of Death'),[1] written in collaboration with Árni Magnússon (1663–1730). In this version, the poem lacks the first stanza of the medieval poem, which describes the gods' debate about Baldr's ominous dreams, and the four modern stanzas, but includes the additions to stanzas 3, 4 and 12. A Latin translation was provided to accompany the Icelandic text, and this translation made the poem accessible to a European audience, albeit with a delay of seventy years.

The decisive impetus towards the popularity of *Baldrs draumar* came in the middle of the eighteenth century with the publication of the first two volumes of a comprehensive history of the Danish kingdom, *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc [...]* (1755; 'Introduction to the History of Denmark [...]') and *Monumens de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes [...]* (1756, 'Monuments of the Mythology and Poetry of the Celts [...]') by the Geneva historian Paul

[1] Pages 632–40. The stanza quoted on pages 368–69 is today no longer considered to be part of *Baldrs draumar*. On Bartholin's study, see Chapter 3.1 in the present volume.

Henri Mallet (1730–1807).[2] In this work, Mallet updated Bartholin's views about the pre-Christian religion of the Scandinavian peoples, in particular their beliefs about heroic death and the afterlife. He employed as evidence examples from Old Norse poetry in a French prose translation which relied to a large extent on Bartholin's Latin versions. Among these were five stanzas from *Baldrs draumar* (Mallet 1756: 147–48).

Thus the poem stood in a specific thematic context when it became more widely known in the eighteenth century, and it was precisely this context that called for renewed attention during the transition from classicism to Romanticism. Emanating from France and then particularly England, a new aesthetic ideal had been spreading since the 1750s. According to a work by Edmund Burke (1729–97), which was influential outside of England as well, this new ideal wished to ascribe the aesthetic sensation not to the appeal of beauty and harmony, as classicism had done, but to the overwhelming impact of 'the sublime' (see Burke 2004 [1757]; Zelle 1987): the terror of the supernatural, the awe before the dark and eerie or the horror in the face of death and the dead (see further Chapter 4.3 above). Affected by a changed notion of nature, as propagated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), this aesthetics cultivated a predilection for the wild and primitive, which found expression all over Europe in the shape of Ossianism. From Mallet, the educated classes might gain the impression that Old Norse poetry was able to provide rich evidence for these ideas, particularly in the selection found in Bartholin's work: heroes who laugh in the face of death, dark scenes in the warriors' otherworld, Valhalla, resurrection of the dead, encounters in the underworld. The depiction of Odin's visit to the grave of the dead seeress with its eerie surroundings almost sets itself up as a prime source of the new aesthetic ideal (Lönnroth 1996: 104–09). In this context *Baldrs draumar* was frequently translated and adapted in the second half of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century, mostly on the basis of Bartholin's version (that is, without the first stanza and the modern stanzas), in some cases even after the Arnamagnæan Edda edition of 1787 had provided a version of the text that included the first stanza of the medieval poem as well as the four additional stanzas. This edition, too, was accompanied by a Latin translation (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, 234–50).

The broad international echo which *Baldrs draumar* created in the transition to Romanticism was significantly aided by its first translation into a modern language. *The Descent of Odin* by the British poet Thomas Gray (1716–71)

[2] For further details, see Chapter 4.5 in the present volume.

made a huge impression on its contemporaries. Gray's *Norse Odes* (including besides *The Descent of Odin* also *The Fatal Sisters*, a translation of *Darraðarljóð*, 'Dörruðr's Song' or 'Song of the Pennant') combine poetry with an academic interest in the largely unknown Norse material in a way typical of its time (Finlay 2007). In particular, the two odes are characterised by memorable imagery which further enhances the 'sublime' character of the poems. Gray responded to another aesthetic demand of his time, which harked back to and updated Horace's programme of *ut pictura poesis* ('as is painting so is poetry') and thus assigned an important role to the strength of the imagery in the art of the poet (Clunies Ross 1998: 108). Gray's ability to combine the ideal of the sublime with pictorialism is evident in the terrifying depiction of the hell-hound, into whose maw the reader, like Odin, is literally made to look. However, in its form the poem — the first attempt at a poetic translation of Old Norse poetry — remained wedded to classicist conventions. Thus it exhibited a strange tension between its darkly Romantic mood and its form (Lönnroth 1996: 108–09), which probably contributed to the ode's success. At any rate, it was widely transmitted internationally in translation.[3]

Overall one can assume that the subject of *Baldrs draumar* would have been quite well known among the European educated classes from at least the end of the eighteenth century. This accounts for the fact that in 1798 a German travel writer, describing the terror of a ride through a rough ravine in the Ore Mountains in bad weather, was able to make an ironic allusion to Odin's hell-ride without further explanation: *Wahrlich, es war der schicklichste Eingang für Odins Helafahrt! Jeden Augenblick fürchte ich die schicksalenthüllende Rune erscheinen zu sehn* ('Truly, it was the most fitting entrance to Odin's hell-ride! I feared to see the fate-revealing rune at any moment') (Anonymous 1798b: 58). As in this instance, it is a common feature of the period that the main focus is given to the frame narrative, or rather the 'sublime' motif of Odin's descent into the realm of the dead rather than on the connection with the myth of Baldr which has been the main context of the poem's reception since the nineteenth century. For example, in 1815 the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) alludes in an isolated instance to the frame

[3] German translations appeared in 1770 (Weiße 1770), 1776 (Müller 1776), and 1800 (Kosegarten 1816; again 1801, 1802, 1824), a French one in 1798 (Anonymous: 89–99), a Russian one in 1803 (Goleniščev-Kutuzov 1803: 70–77). There were also a number of imitations. Most research has thus far focused on Gray's impact in the English-speaking area, where the huge echo of Gray's *Norse Odes* was preceded by a certain level of irritation; see Clunies Ross 1998: 105–11; Omberg 1976: 45–47; Farley 1903: Appendix B, 236–39.

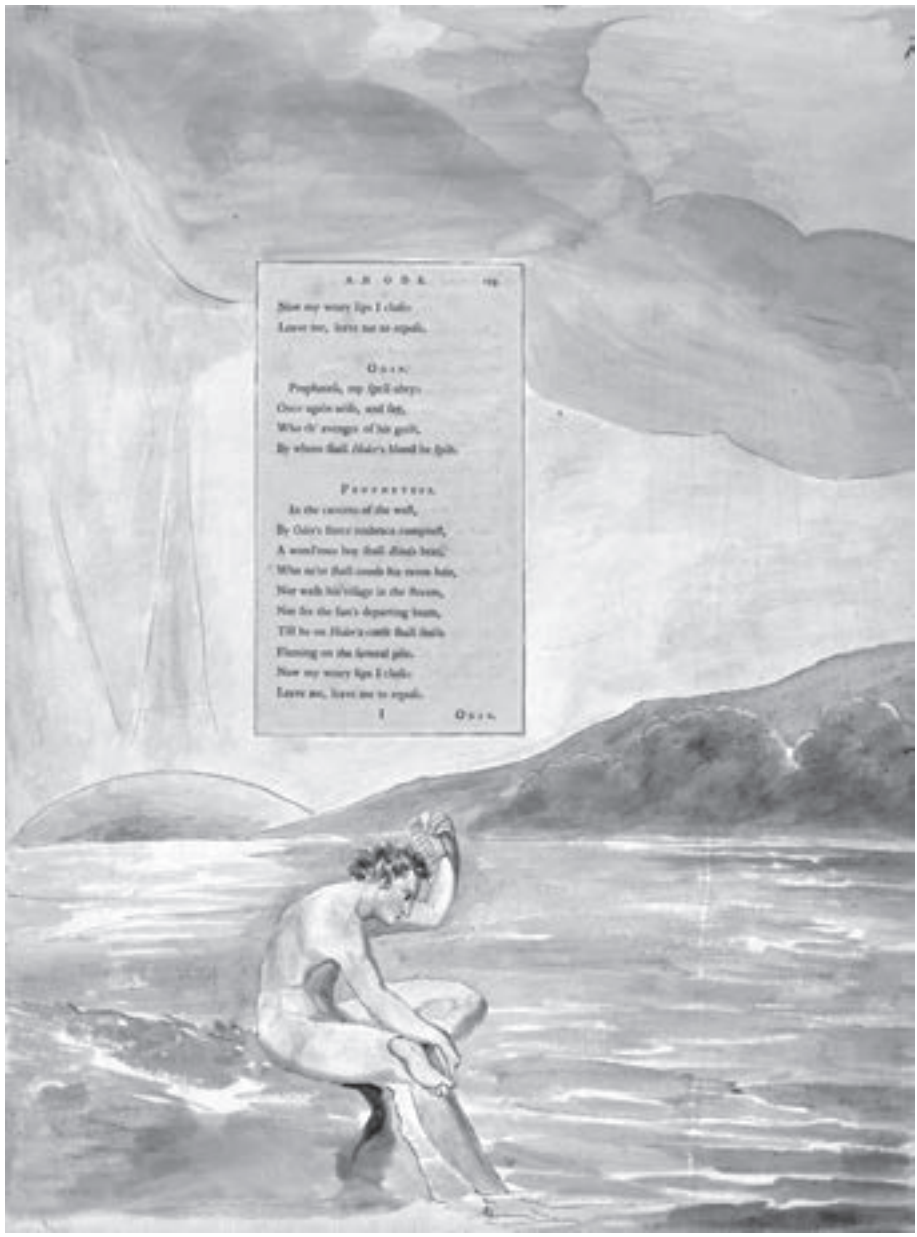

Figure 5.8.1. William Blake, 'The Descent of Odin', in *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, Design 83. Between 1797 and 1798. Watercolour with pen and black ink and graphite on moderately thick, slightly textured, cream wove paper with inlaid letterpress page. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Figure 5.8.2. Henry Fuseli, 'The Descent of Odin', in
The Poems of Grey: A New Edition, ed. F. du Roveray.
Photograph courtesy of the Barr Smith Library, The University of Adelaide.

narrative of *Baldrs draumar*, in which he saw a classical katabasis and a simile for the philosopher's search for truth: *Wie Odin am Höllenthor die alte Seherin in ihrem Grabe immer weiter ausfrägt […], so muß der Philosoph unerbittlich sich selbst ausfragen* ('Just as Odin at the gate to hell interrogates the old seeress further and further, the philosopher must interrogate himself relentlessly') (Schopenhauer 1989: 116). The British geologist William Buckland (1784–1856), however, used the same scene in *The Professor's Descent* (1822) to parody the geologist's work (see O'Connor 2007: 108–14). A late remnant of this fairly selective view of the poem can still be found in 1871 in the work of Richard Wagner (1813–83), who harks back to the narrative frame of *Baldrs draumar* in the third act of *Siegfried*, where the exchange of knowledge between Wotan and Erda is intended to symbolize the relationship between the constructive-masculine spirit and the femininely connoted nature (Lönnroth 1996: 109–12). These and other examples show that in this rather early period of reception Old Norse poetry was updated primarily by associating it with known motifs, in this case with the topos of the underworld journey whose rich tradition stretched back to Homer via Virgil, Ovid, Dante and others: a topos enjoying immense popularity in the literature of the Enlightenment and the early Romantic period.

On the one hand, the translations of *Baldrs draumar* (and of *The Descent of Odin*) show a wide international interest in the poem and its subject matter. On the other hand it is obvious that the core area of its reception lay in the English- and German-speaking world. In Great Britain it was in particular the visual arts which took up the inspiration of Gray's impressive poetic imagery; thus the painters Johann Heinrich Füssli (Henry Fuseli, 1741–1825), George Romney (1734–1802) and William Blake (1757–1827) attempted to render Odin's meeting with the seeress in visual terms (see Clunies Ross 1998: 118–66 and Chapter 6.2.5 below).[4] Here, too, the greater emphasis was placed on the frame narrative, even though attempts were made to depict elements from the seeress's vision visually (Figure 5.8.1) or to show the wisdom dialogue jointly with the vision (Figure 5.8.2, see Timme 2013).

A now lost painting by the Stuttgart painter Philipp Friedrich von Hetsch (1758–1839), which depicts Odin's waking of the seeress, was also inspired by Gray's poem. It was criticised in the periodical *Teutscher Merkur* (Anonymous 1807) for the fact that its classicist aesthetic did not do justice to the 'almost

[4] Blake's illustrations can all be accessed at <http://www.blakearchive.org> [accessed 10 June 2017].

terrible complexion' of the poem; an impression confirmed by a surviving oil sketch (Figure 5.8.3, Anonymous 1807: 53).

This instance aside, in the German-speaking world one can observe a more learned and literary interest in *Baldrs draumar*. Soon after the publication of Gray's ode, there appeared translations by the Viennese Jesuit Michael Denis (*Odins Helafahrt*, 1772) and by Johann Gottfried Herder (*Odins Höllenfahrt*, 1773; *Das Grab der Prophetin*, 1778/79). Both of these authors were just as enthusiastic about Ossian as Gray was but had very little in common otherwise. Herder's translation, which needs to be viewed in the context of his extensive work on the poetry of ancient peoples, verifies the impact of Gray outside of Great Britain earlier than Hetsch's painting. However, with the similarities to *The Descent of Odin* limited to aspects of content, Herder went his own way in terms of form. This is due to his specific views about the nature of poetry and his expectation that it was precisely the poetic strangeness of primordial poetry that was able to provide aesthetic renewal;[5] this strangeness had to be maintained in a congenial adaptation. Therefore Herder also looked to the form of the original text, even though he did not know Old Icelandic and used the Latin translation of *Baldrs draumar* as printed in Bartholin as his model. For *Odins Höllenfahrt* he invented a short, unrhymed two-stress line which shows a distant similarity to *fornyrðislag*, albeit without alliteration. He mainly kept this metrical form in *Das Grab der Prophetin*, the second version of his translation, although he now mostly combined two short lines into long four-stress lines.

The openness to poetic form exhibited by Herder's version contrasts strongly with that of Denis, which shows no sensitivity to the specific form of the original. The later German translators of the poem, Friedrich David Gräter (1792) and Friedrich Majer (1803), followed Herder's choice of short two-stress lines, as did Bertel Christian Sandvig in Denmark (1779/85) and Erik Gustav Geijer in Sweden (1811). In other languages, translators stuck to traditional end-rhyming metres, as in the English versions of Amos Cottle (1797) and William Herbert (1803–04), and the French version of A. Ménestrier (1804); or, they chose to translate into prose like Mallet (1756) or the Russian translator Pavel L'vov (1799). This makes the free verse of an English translation by the painter Füssli, which appeared hidden away in a review of the Copenhagen Edda edition in 1788, all the more conspicuous (see Clunies Ross 1998: 130–31).

[5] Herder expands on this view in reference to Old Norse poetry: *Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* [1773] (Herder 1891b: 165–66). On Herder's views on translation in the context of Old Norse poetry, see Ebel 1973 and Malm 1996: 152–54. On Herder's use of Old Norse literature, see Chapter 5.1 above.

Figure 5.8.3. Philipp Friedrich von Hetsch, oil sketch on board (45 × 56 cm) for the (lost) painting *Odin vor dem Höllenthor* (also *Odin und die Prophetin*) ('Odin before the Gate of Hell', also known as 'Odin and the Prophetess'). Before 1807. Photograph courtesy of Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

Also in succession to Herder stand the *Scandinavische Weissagungen* ('Scandinavian Prophecies') (*c.* 1806) by the German poet Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806), an epic poem in free, two-stress short lines, which outwardly follows *Baldrs draumar* in its combination of narrative frame and wisdom dialogue, but adapts its content in a very independent manner. It eschews a learned adaptation of the myth in favour of poetic renewal (see Krömmelbein 1997). Significantly, Günderrode modifies the constellation of personae, the epic structure and the inventory of motifs of *Baldrs draumar*. It is not Odin himself who travels to Hel; rather, he sends Frigga to interrogate the seeress. This may have been inspired by Frank Sayer's dramatic sketch *The Descent of Frea* (1790); a German version of this (*Die Niederfahrt der Göttin Freya*) had appeared in Gräter's magazine *Bragur* in 1792 together with his translation of *Baldrs draumar*. However, Günderrode elsewhere shows an interest in situations in which women gain knowledge. At any rate, all protagonists

in the *Scandinavische Weissagungen* are female. In place of Odin, the goddess Frigga sets out to obtain information about Baldr's fate, accompanied by her companion Fulla. From this results a wisdom dialogue in front of the entrance *zum finstern | Reiche der Hela* ('to the dark | realm of Hel') (Günderrode 1990 [*c*. 1806]: 340), in which Frigga instructs Fulla in the fate of the world and the ancient conflict between gods and giants. Günderrode here goes far beyond the material of *Baldrs draumar* and has Freya report information which is transmitted in *Völuspá* and *Gylfaginning* and is reproduced by Gräter in the aforementioned issue of *Bragur* in the idiosyncratic order of 'Nordic Metamorphoses'. In Herder and Denis, Günderrode would also have been able to read German translations of *Völuspá*. Like *Völuspá*, her epic poem looks back far into the past before the seeress prophesies the downfall of the world in the near future in apocalyptic images. Thus Günderrode shifts the focus to an aspect of the story which is only alluded to in *Baldrs draumar* and which becomes comprehensible in light of *Völuspá* and *Gylfaginning*, namely, the world-historical connection between Baldr's death and *Ragnarök* which she interprets as a convergence of individual and universal fate (Krömmelbein 1997: 301; cf. Chapter 5.1 above). She avoids all motifs from *Baldrs draumar* which are contrary to this interest, even the generally fascinating hell-hound: she is less interested in the 'horror'-effect than in the poetic renewal of mythological imagery along the lines of the 'New Mythology' as propagated by Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) and others (Schlegel 2000 [1800]). The Norse myths in Günderrode's work therefore stand in the context of a broader interest in mythological subjects (among which oriental myths were dominant).

Günderrode's epic poem opens up a new chapter in the history of the reception of *Baldrs draumar*, in the sense that the attention, which used to be focused on the eddic poem itself and elements of its frame narrative, now moves to the matter of Baldr and its connection to the mythological history of the world. This can also be seen in the work of Günderrode's near-contemporary Friedrich Gottlob Wetzel (1779–1819). While the title of his poem *Der Wole Grab: Das nordische Requiem* ('The Völva's Grave: The Norse Requiem'),[6] foregrounds Odin's descent and the dialogue with the dead, the motif — and the stanzas inspired by *Baldrs draumar* (3, 9–20) — is integrated into a cycle of mythological world history, which is influenced by the natural philosophy of Romanticism: the gods represent the highest form of life and will perish in the process of the present 'formation of the earth'. Baldur 'as the most beautiful

[6] This appeared first in the journal *Phoebus* 1808 (3–9), again in Wetzel 1814: 33–41.

wilts first and with him the first golden age of the world', the ancient seeress comes into being and dies with the earth. The end of the world is followed by an age of infinite harmony, for which Baldur's return is *das sprechendste Sinnbild* ('the most evocative image') (Wetzel 1814: 43–44). This view of the fate of the world is enabled by an obvious device: Wetzel blends the narrative frames of *Baldrs draumar* and *Völuspá* in such a way that the seeress, whom Odin wakes from her grave, speaks both prophecies consecutively — the first in iambic six-line verses, the second in trochaic three-line verses — and, in a modification of the last stanza of *Baldrs draumar*, finally sends Odin away with the prospect of Baldr's death and his *ew'gen Morgen* ('eternal morning').

Like Günderrode's *Weissagungen*, Wetzel's poem *Der Wole Grab* shows, through its romantic look at mythological world history, that *Baldrs draumar* had begun to lose some of its appeal as an independent text in the nineteenth century. Against the background of *Völuspá* and *Gylfaginning* and in light of the opportunities for the reception of Norse myths provided by a combination of these sources, the impact of the poem faded the more the focus shifted to Baldr's death and its world-historical effects: when read as a source for the Baldr myth, *Baldrs draumar* reports scarcely any details which are not documented elsewhere.

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Part 6

The Reception in Drama and the Visual Arts from *c.* 1750

6.1.1 – Early Representations of Old Nordic Religions in Drama

Terry Gunnell*

As an art form, drama is more complex than literature, art or even music. Drama is meant to be heard, seen and experienced rather than read in solitude. It should thus always be remembered that the written plays of the past found in libraries and archives are (if they were performed at all) little more than the bare bones or archaeological remains of live performances that took place in theatre spaces in front of large audiences who experienced them as living three-dimensional activities in space and present time, much as they experienced the everyday world around them. Effective drama could thus be more influential than literature for a wider range of the public in terms of shaping opinion. Drama telling of events in the past also wielded a powerful influence on how people understood that past, not only in terms of what happened but the way that it looked and how it might have sounded (as the Catholic Church had realized with liturgical drama in the Middle Ages). There is little question that this also applies to the way early Nordic religions and Nordic mythology have been presented on stage over time.

In the review that follows in both this chapter and in Chapter 5.1 of Volume II, it must be borne in mind that it will never be possible to understand exactly

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Terry Gunnell is Professor of Folkloristics at the University of Iceland. Working essentially in the field of performance studies, he is the author of *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (1995); editor of *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (2007); and co-editor (with Annette Lassen) of *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá* and *Nordic Days of Judgement* (2013).

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Disa.
Thet är en lustigh Comoedia/
om then förständighe och höghberömde Sweriges Drotningh
Erin Disa/
Hwilken sanferdelighen på Rim vthsatt/och hållen åhr i Obsala Marknad/nemligen then 17. och 18. Februarij/ Åhr efter Gudz bördh 1611/
Aff
JOHANNE MESSENIO
Professore ther sammestädes.
Tryckt vthi Stockholm aff Anund Olufsons Arffuingar/ Åhr 1611.

Figure 6.1.1.1. Front cover of *Disa*, by Johannes Messenius. Stockholm: Anund Olufsons Arffuingar, 1611. Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Sweden.

how people experienced the various dramas that will be mentioned, or how their authors envisaged them. The moment of performance has been lost. Nonetheless, the works themselves, their scenic descriptions, extant images of performances and other contextual materials will be used to try and give a more detailed understanding of how the authors and directors of these works have presented depictions of Old Nordic religions and mythology on stage over the centuries, and why they felt the need to use such material in their works. Naturally, while their works helped to shape the understanding of their audiences with regard to this material, these artists were themselves under the influence of their predecessors and their contemporary world, and not least limited by the source materials available to them in the form of both written accounts and archaeological information about how the past might have looked. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries discussed in this chapter, classical education and the 'Grand Tour' had ensured that much more was known about the appearance of the classical world than the local past of the Nordic countries, and the effects of this on the works in question are obvious.

As regards the role of Old Nordic religions on the stage during these periods, it is evident that while today they are essentially a means of evoking fantasy, mysticism, excitement and even nostalgia, in the past they had a broader role related first of all to their part in the widespread attempt to create new 'national' forms of literature which could stand alongside and even replace the classical models that had hitherto been staples of education and cultural entertainment in the North. These new forms of literature, encouraged by thinkers such as Herder, Steffens, Grundtvig, Oehlenschläger, Schlegel, Høyen and others, also tended to have a political role in helping nations sense their global standing (particularly in the case of Sweden in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), their cultural roots and their 'difference' (see further Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999; Wilson 2004; Williamson 2004; and especially Leersen 2006: 105–26, 145–58 and 173–218). Then as now, authors, directors and other cultural entrepreneurs were well aware of the widespread influences that the dramatic media could have on the local and international public.

The earliest drama to make use of motifs relating to Old Nordic religion appeared during the late Renaissance in Sweden. It was intended to be the first of a planned series of around fifty dramas designed to inform the Swedish public not only about their national history and global importance, but also about their ancient international roots and intimate connections to the classical world (Marker and Marker 1975: 24). The work in question, composed and performed during the period of Gustav II's international expansion, was created as a challenging alternative to the classical dramas of Terence and Plautus

that were still being read and performed in the Latin schools and universities of Sweden and other Nordic countries. In performance, the drama deliberately attempted to recreate aspects of Old Nordic religion in close proximity to a site at which large-scale pagan rituals had originally taken place, thereby directly linking the past with the present. As such it offers interesting parallels with later developments in Germany closer to our own time (see further Chapter 5.1 of Volume II).

Disa, written by Johannes Messenius (1579–1636) (see Messenio 1611; Messenius 1989; and Johanneson 2007: 87–91) and performed publically outdoors by his students from the University of Uppsala at the Disting market in February 1611,[1] is one of the earliest known Swedish dramas. It was to maintain its popularity at home and abroad in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Marker and Marker 1975: 24; Sauter 1989: 56–60).

Set in *c.* 1002 BC (Messenius 1989: 67), the play is based in part on popular ideas going back to Jordanes about the settlement of Sweden by Noah's grandson, Magog, and the subsequent migration of the Swedes/Goths to other parts of the world owing to problems of hunger (ideas which were becoming central to the Swedish Gothic movement at this time: see further Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999: 10–14). It is essentially an attempt to provide some aetiological explanation of the origin and name of the market. Of most relevance (and particularly in relation to its Uppsala setting) are the first three scenes of the play. Here the local Swedish audience came face to face with the high thunder god Thor, his sword-carrying *Drengh* ('boy') Oden (here said to have ruled in Asia and to have connections with magic and warfare), and the bow-bearing Frigga, wife of Oden and here the goddess of love and peace, as they appear one by one on the stage, providing background information about the human and animal sacrifices they used to receive at Uppsala every nine years, and how the lack of respect shown them at present will lead to drought and starvation (Messenius 1989: 71–73).[2] There is little question that the image of the three gods here has a background in the accounts (and woodcut images) of worship at the temple at Gamla Uppsala provided in Johannes Magnus's *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque Regibus* (Johannes Magnus 1554: 36–43) and Olaus Magnus's *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* (Olaus Magnus 1555: 100–07). Both works (see further Chapter 3.1 above) have distant roots

[1] The Disting market where *Disa* was performed was not held at Gamla Uppsala but in the meadows south of the modern city of Uppsala. I am grateful to Anders Andrén for providing me with this information.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this chapter are my own.

in the account of worship at Old Uppsala given in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiæ pontificum* from *c*. 1050, which also tells of statues of three gods (Wotan, Fricco [probably Freyr, rather than Frigg] and Thor), human sacrifice, and a temple surrounded with a golden chain which stood at Gamla Uppsala. The replacement of Fricco by Frigga and the suggestion that the goddess wields a bow (thereby linking her with Diana as well as Venus) are also found in the work of the Magnus brothers. The images accompanying these earlier works also give a good indication of how Messenius and his contemporaries would have imagined (and presented) the three gods. There is little sense of historical accuracy here.

The international impact of Olaus Magnus's work is emphasized by the fact that the same woodcuts (if not text) from the works of Olaus Magnus appear to lie behind a similar scene in *King Arthur, or, The British Worthy* by John Dryden (1631–1700), written eighty years later, which provides a little more insight into the way in which the English viewed the early sacrificial activities related to the Nordic and Germanic gods (Dearing 1996: 17–21; see also Quinn and Clunies Ross 1994: 189–210). *King Arthur*, a semi-opera with music by Henry Purcell, was first performed in London in 1691. The scene in question depicts a Saxon sacrifice at 'a place of Heathen worship' where the audience encountered 'the three Saxon Gods, Woden, Thor and Freya placed on Pedestals'. Also encountered in the scene, which includes mention of lot-casting, horse sacrifices and the use of 'Sacred Runick Rhimes' in battle, is a 'fierce earthy spirit' who comes from 'Hell'.

Some forty years were to pass before the appearance of the next work to have some relevance in the present context. *Brynilda eller den Olyckelige Kärleken: Tragedia i Tre Öpningar* (1738) was written by Olof (von) Dalin (1708–63), who was to play a central role in the Swedish Gothic movement with the publication of his *Svea Rikes Historia* from 1747 (see further Chapter 4.4 above and Clunies Ross and Lönnroth 1999: 13). First performed in Stockholm in November 1738, and dedicated to Queen Ulrika Eleonora (wife of Fredrik I of Sweden), *Brynilda* is very loosely based on the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Brynhildr that had appeared in Peringskiöld's Swedish translation of *Þiðreks saga* (*Wilkina Saga* 1715; see further Haymes 2012: 27; and Dalin 1738: preceding p.1). Essentially a neoclassical tragedy composed in alexandrines in the style of Racine, Corneille and Voltaire, the play (which, in 1752, was also to introduce the Nordic neoclassical form to Danish theatre-goers) tells of some highly complicated relationships centring around the love of the warlike Princess Brynilda for the hero Sigurd Sven (Skunke 2007a: 171, 176–77; Marker and Marker 1975: 70, 72, 75). While the play says little about the

mythological side of the story, it ends in true neoclassical style with a dramatic scene at an outside 'temple' dedicated to the unnamed gods (in the plural), where Sigurd is killed offstage by Brynilda's foster-father Angantyr, becoming an implied blood sacrifice (Dalin 1738: 35–44). Essentially, *Brynilda* signalled that Nordic mythical figures and settings could effectively be used to replace classical images in local Swedish drama, even if the replacement in question was largely limited to the level of names, motifs and plots. Otherwise, it appears that what audiences witnessed on stage in this play looked very similar to what they had seen in classical dramas.

Similar attempts to appropriate local material drawn from the Iron Age to replace Greek or Roman classical storylines were taking place during the same period in Germany. One of the first German dramas to make reference to Germanic and Nordic mythology, *Hermanns Schlacht* by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803),[3] published in 1769, continues the contemporary European tradition of drawing on classical sources, but now deftly employs them as a means of demonstrating the superiority of local Germanic heroes compared to those of southern stock. Focusing on the defeat of the Romans in Teutoburger Wood in 9 AD by Arminius (here called 'Hermann') documented in Tacitus's *Annals*, Book II, the play underlines the Nordic-Germanic heroic indifference to death that had been illustrated by Thomas Bartholin in his *Antiqvitatum Danicarum [...]* from 1689 (see Chapter 3.1). Published just a year after Denis's German translation of Macpherson's internationally popular

[3] A further two plays on Arminius (Hermann) by Klopstock, *Hermann und die Fürsten* and *Hermanns Tod*, appeared in 1784 and 1787: see Klopstock 1854: v.1, 57–148 and 275–376. On Klopstock and his personal connections with Ewald (see below), see Arnold 2007: 30–37 and Chapters 5.1 and 5.2 above. The popularity of the subject is witnessed in the appearance of at least three other less noteworthy dramas from this same general period dealing with the same events: see *Hermann* (1743), by Johann Elias Schlegel (1717–49), published in Gottscheden 1746–50: 1–74; *Thusnelde und Hermann* (set in a sacred grove), by Freiherr Christoph Otto Schönaich, published in Schönaich 1754: 121–70; and *Die Hermannsschlacht* (written in 1808 by Heinrich von Kleist), published in von Kleist 1940. Regarding the work of Schleger and Schönaich, see Heitner (1963: 81–105, 153–65). Nordic mythological themes had earlier appeared in several Germanic operatic works: in *Der königliche Printz Regnerus*, by Johann Christian Schieferdecker (1679–1732), staged in Hamburg in 1702; and then the musical dramas *La costanza sforzata: Die gezwungene Beständigkeit oder Die listige Rache des Sueno* (1706); *Desiderius, König der Langobarden* (1708–09); and *Der von Othino, dem Uhrheber des Dänischen Reiches, geschlossene Tempel des Janus* (1722 and 1729) with music composed by Reinhard Keiser (1674–1739). The close connection with the classical is seen in the fact that the last was apparently a reworking of Keiser's *Janus*, or *Der bey dem allgemeinen Welt-Friede von dem grossen Augustus geschlossene Tempel des Janus* (1698).

Ossian began to appear (1768–69), the play also presents an intriguing blend of the Celtic, the classical and the Germanic: A blood sacrifice of an eagle is made at an altar in the grove of the gods, and Hermann's 'druids' and 'bards' talk regularly of a Walhalla that awaits the dead while singing hymns to Wodan (also referred to as Jupiter), Thuiskon and Mana (Tuisto and Mannus from Tacitus's *Germania*), Rhadamanthus and Minos (who rule a world of death), and the goddesses Diren, Alekto and Furie. Mention is also made of the sacred wagon of peace of Hertha (that is Nerthus) and the isolated lake in which the goddess is bathed (see Klopstock 1769: 14, 17–24, 33–34, 69–72, 105–06, 125 and 126; and Klopstock's notes on 138–39, 142 and 147–48). The final words of the play in which Wodan is called on to witness Hermann's victory give an effective reflection of the way in which Klopstock uses the Nordic gods and Celtic bards as a means of local colouring (Klopstock 1769: 137).[4]

A similar strange blend of Ossianic, classical and Nordic elements is found in the depiction of religious activities in *Frode og Fingal* written by the Norwegian official Christen Pram (1756–1821) for the Danish stage in 1790 (on Pram, see Chapter 5.4 above). The play has its roots in arguments made by the influential Peter Fredrik Suhm (1728–98) in his *Historie af Danmark* (1782–93) about potential connections having existed between the Frothar of Lochlin (Lochlann) mentioned in *Ossian*, and Frotho I and Frotho III who appear in Books II and V of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, Frotho I having apparently given his sister's hand in marriage to his friend Scottus, *qui et ipse Scottici nominis conditor fuit* ('the eponyomous founder of the Scottish race').[5] Set outside Lejre in Denmark, it tells of a Denmark troubled by uncertainty and rumour during the long absence of King Hading's son Frode, and the moral difficulties faced by the man Frode has asked to rule in his absence. Over and above the play's euhemeristic blend of cultural and mythological worlds, its most interesting aspect in the present context is the initial setting at:

> Hadings Gravhøi. Egnen er opfyldt af Kongernes Gravhøie. Tingstedet er i Baggrunden. Det er i Nærheden af Leire. [...] Høvindingerne forsamlede ved Hadings Gravhøi, hvor de have hendrevet Natten til hans Minni. Deels omringe de Hadings Bautasteen, nedbøiede, lænede paa deres Spyde, deels sidde paa de Stene, der omgive Tingstedet, paa Træs stød o. s. v. (Pram 1790: 1)

[4] I am grateful to Michael Adler and Ingunn Ásdísardóttir for their help with the translation of this play.

[5] Saxo's work had been available in Vedel's Danish translation since the mid-seventeenth century. On Scottus, see *Saxo* 2015: I, ii. 2, 11, pp. 94–95.

> (Hading's Grave mound. The area is full of royal grave mounds. In the background is the *þing* [government meeting] site. It is in the vicinity of Lejre. [...] The chieftains are gathered around Hading's grave mound where they have spent the night in his memory. Some of them stand around Hading's memorial stone, heads bent, resting on their spears, while others sit on the stones surrounding the *þing* site, on tree stumps and so on.)

Close by, apparently, is *høie Odins Altre* ('high Odin's altar') in *Alfaders Lund* ('the Allfather's Grove'), which the chieftains visit to celebrate after having chosen a new ruler in Frode's place (Pram 1790: 11, 13–14), thereby underlining the sense that a close connection existed in pagan times between grave mounds, holy sites and *þing* meeting places or other places of rulership (something reflected by the archaeological remains at Jelling in Jutland). Elsewhere, mention is made of *Odins Domstoel i Valhal* ('Odin's place of judgement in Valhalla'), the horrors of Hela and *Freias Alter* ('Freia's altar'), where people declare their love to each other (Pram 1790: 47–48, 76, 84). Particularly interesting are the extant illustrations of two of the sets used in the production (see Krogh 1932: 274–77) which, in addition to showing the *þing*-meeting site and grave mounds of the first scene, also give some sense of the uncertain understanding people had of royal halls and Iron Age ships at this time.

The implied links between contemporary royalty, ancient mythology and the dead had an even greater relevance in Sweden during the same period. As is evident from other chapters of this book (see especially Chapter 6.2.2 below), Gothic themes were very much in fashion at the court of King Gustav III (1746–92), who was not only one of the most powerful theatrical patrons of the period but also a playwright himself. The period produced a wave of new Swedish dramas which went out of their way to connect the present-day rulers of Sweden to an ancient past that was increasingly coming to light in the form of early Icelandic texts and through archaeology (even though the latter was still in its infancy). The plays in question, stressing the euhemeristic sides of mythology reflected in the works of Snorri and Saxo, and developed in the later influential writings of scholars like Rudbeck and Suhm, worked hard to imply links between Swedish royalty and the gods of the past.

Gustav III's own prose *comedi i en act* ('comedy in one act'), *Odin och Frigga* from 1783 (see Gustav III 1806–12: 307–41), inspired in part by an earlier French comedy, underlines the image of the pseudo-religious and early historical roots of the Swedish monarchy. The play has particular interest here because of the visual presentation the text provides of Old Nordic religious activities, which are given further context by an image of the stage set created by Louis

Figure 6.1.1.2. Louis Jean Desprez, 'Scenery for the Opera *Frigga*'. 1787.
Photo courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.
Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum (Yuri Molodkovets).

Jean Desprez (1743–1804) for a later version of the play from 1787,[6] and the depiction of the final tableaux of the play by M. R. Heland, which accompanies the 1806 edition of the play (see Gustav III 1806–12: 340 and 341; and Heed 2007: fig. 10).

The play is set in ancient Sweden, after Oden has returned from Asia and established himself as a king and high priest. Its immediate context is that Oden has rescued Princess Frigga from the murderer of her father, Gylfe, brought her up secretly in a grotto and then later established her as a 'goddess' over whom he has control as a means of strengthening his rule over Sweden. Frigga and Oden's son, Yngve, observe each other in Frigga's temple (a scene perhaps influenced by the story of Freyr and Gerðr). Both then come to the realization that

[6] Note that *Odin och Frigga* is later often referred to as *Frigga* on the basis of the name of this later production (*Frigga*), for which the play was turned into an opera with a libretto by Carl Gustaf Leopold (1756–1829) and music by Olof Åhlstrom. On these two works, see further Skunke (2007b: 198, 206, 272 and fig. 10); and Marker and Marker (1975: 94).

Figure 6.1.1.3. Image of the final scene of *(Odin och) Frigga*, from *Gustav IIIs Skrifter* (Stockholm: Carl Delén, 1806), II, between pp. 340 and 341.
Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Sweden.

the 'goddess' is as human as Yngve, but, ever clever, Oden envisages a way of strengthening his dynasty still further by proposing that a public marriage should take place between his successor and the 'goddess' that his subjects still imagine to exist.

The extant image of Desprez's set adds colour and detail to Gustav's description of the setting of the play which states: *Teatern föreställer den heliga Lunden, som omgifver Friggas Tempel, hvilket man ser i fonden mellan träden* ('The stage depicts the holy grove surrounding Frigga's temple, which can be seen in the background amongst the trees') (Gustav III 1806–12: 309). The painting demonstrates that in the production in question, the temple, with its columns modelled on Greek archaeological remains, is flanked by a couple of Egyptian sphinxes, with a few Nordic runestones standing alongside for added local colour. There is little question about the degree to which the contemporary understanding of Old Nordic religion was still strongly under the influence of the classical models travellers had encountered on the Grand Tours of the time (Desprez had often visited Italy).

It seems that a similar backdrop (including the classical temples in the distance: see Leopold 1790: preceding p. 1) might have been used for Carl Gustaf Leopold's similarly neoclassical and poetic *Oden eller Asarnas utvandring: Tragedie i fem acter* (1790),[7] set in a similar period, which was dedicated to Gustav III and had a similar Gothic message. Based on the suggestions of earlier scholars that Óðinn and the Æsir were initially forced to move north as a result of Roman expansion (earlier associated with Pompey by Olof Dalin in his *Svea Rikes Historia*, 1747–61), the play centres around the tragic encounter between Oden, ruler of the Scythians in Tanais (including one chieftain named Sigurd), in north-western Asia, and Pompé's Roman legions. As usual for the period, the play also involves several amorous complications. It ends with another implied blood sacrifice in a scene in which an altar can again be seen in the background (Leopold 1790: 110) and Oden's plans to move north (with his son Yngve) into lands the Roman Empire has not reached (Leopold 1790: 135).[8] The audience would have known what followed and would have obviously understood well the implied links with the present day.

[7] On this play, see further Schück and Warburg 1911–16: 409–13; Skunke 2007b: 208, and Marker and Marker 1975: 87–91.

[8] Among other neoclassical works from this period making use of local early Nordic historical material is the first Danish opera libretto, *Gram og Signe, eller Kierligheds og Tapperheds Mesterstykker: Et Synge-Spil* (1756), written by the Norwegian author Niels Krog Bredal (1733–78) (based on the account in Book 1 of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*): see Bredal 1756. While

Arguably the high point of Swedish drama for the public which implied connections or parallels between Swedish royalty and the Nordic gods was reached in the visually stunning masque *Balder: Allegoriskt Divertissement af Sång och Dans*, by Johan David Valerius (1776–1852), first performed in Stockholm on 26 January 1819 (with music by Jean Baptiste Edouard Depuy). The play is set partly at *Ida-slätten* (Iðavöllr) and partly in the borderlands of Sweden and Norway, with the initial image greeting the audience as follows:

> Theatern föreställer en del af Idaslätten, med Asken Ygdrasil, vid hvars fot ses Vishetens källa, vaktad af Mimer. I fonden glänsande Skyar, som supponeras betäcka Gimle eller Gudarnes bøning, hvarifrån Bifrost eller Himmelens-bryggan går ned til Jorden. (Valerius 1819: 5)
>
> (The set shows part of Iðavöllr, with the ash Yggdrasill, beside the foot of which can be seen the Spring of Wisdom, watched over by Mimer. The stage shows shining clouds which are supposed to hide Gimle or the dwelling place of the gods, from which Bifrost or Heaven's bridge runs down to the earth.)

The play begins with a choir of *Elfvor och Neckar* ('elves and water spirits') (probably seen here as water nymphs) singing and being chased away from the world tree by Mimer. This is followed by the appearance of Urda, Werdandi and Skuld, *Alfaders döttrar* ('daughters of the All-father'), *med runstafvar, den sistnämda derjemt med sköld* ('with rune sticks, the last also with a shield'), who, similar to the Three Witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, call forth silhouettes of earlier Swedish rulers, including Yngve Freyr, Ragnar lodbrok and Gustaf Vasa, once again underlining the link between the Vanir and the Vasa

the characters in the play refer periodically to 'Odin' and other (unnamed) gods as a vague means of providing local and historical colouring, the text says nothing specific about mythology or religious practice; see further Krogh 1932: 252–53, on the classical aspects of the setting of this play. The same applies to other works from the period based on Saxo, such as *En uventede Forlibelse eller Cupido Philosophe* (1757) by the Danish playwright, Anna Catharine von Passow (1731–57) (on a wandering Cupido's attempt to help the relationship between Freya and Odrus); Birgitte Catharine Boye's *Sigrid eller Regnalds Død: Et heroisk Skuespil* (1795); Johannes Ewald's *Rolf Krage* (1770); and Christen Pram's *Lagertha: Et dramatisk forsøg* (based on an episode in Book IX of *Gesta Danorum*, and once again boasting a group of shield-maidens) from 1789, which was later turned into a ballet as *Lagertha: Et Pantomimisk Sorgespil med Sang* with Vincenzo Galeotti in 1801: see Pram 1824: 65–102; von Passow 1757; Marker and Marker 1975: 105–06; and Krogh 1932: 278–82, with an image of the set of the latter work on 281. Also worth noting in this context is the first truly Norwegian historical drama, *Einer Tambeskielver: Et Sørgespil* (1772, but first performed in Bergen in 1793), by Johan Nordahl Brun (1745–1816), a highly nationalistic work which draws on *Heimskringla*. For a modern edition of the play (which for obvious reasons says little about Old Nordic religion), see Brun 1945.

Figure 6.1.1.4. Peter Cramer: Painting of the final scene of *Balders død* (1779). Photograph courtesy of Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. © SMK Photo.

Figure 6.1.1.5. Thomas Bruun, scenery for *Gorm den Gamle* (1785).
Photograph courtesy of Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen © SMK Photo.

line that had come to an end with Karl XIII in 1810. Following this, Balder and his son Forsete step down from behind the opening clouds to reunite the newly divided land (now Sweden and Norway) under a new king.[9] The previous set is then replaced by a beautiful borderland landscape filled with people of both sexes from many different provinces, as the two gods are effectively replaced by the figures of Karl Johan (Jean Baptiste Bernadotte: King Karl XIV Johan of Sweden, and Karl III Johan of Norway from 5 February 1818 to 1844) and his son Oskar, thereby transforming poetic mythology into fact.

Valerius' choice to place emphasis on Baldr as a Swedish forefather (rather than Yngvi-Freyr) was no coincidence, but rather a reflection of a new movement that was emerging throughout northern Europe as authors became ever more aware of the form of the original eddic poems, a movement that was to reach a peak in the flood of Baldr dramas that were to appear in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. The first step in the movement in

[9] Following the Napoleonic Wars and defeat in the Swedish-Norwegian War of 1814, Norway had been united with Sweden (though with its own constitution).

question had been taken earlier in Denmark with the appearance of *Balders død* (1773–75) by Johannes Ewald (1743–81) (see Ewald 1814–16: III, 1–104; for an English translation, see Ewald 1889; see further Chapter 5.2 above). After a relatively plain first performance in 1778, the play was redesigned in some style by Peter Cramer (1726–82) for a new production in Copenhagen in 1779 (and then translated into German within five years: see Ewald 1785). *Balders død* was to set a completely new standard and direction for drama dealing with Old Nordic religions. Still making little obvious reference to eddic poetry, the storyline of the play is mainly based on a mixture of Saxo's and Snorri's accounts of Baldr's death in that it tells of the tragic love between Nanna, daughter of Gevar and the hero Hother, and the consequences of Nanna arousing the attention and desire of the god Balder. Much of the play serves to reiterate the powerful omens that suggest Balder's desire for Nanna will result in his death, omens which Balder consistently ignores in good tragic style. Ewald's addition of the theatrical figure of Loke is an innovation. Absent from Saxo, and thus drawn largely from Snorri's *Prose Edda*, this first stage version of Loke takes the shape of a malicious supernatural being with a love of disguise. His character has elements strongly reminiscent of Shakespeare's Puck and Marlowe's Mephistopheles.[10] As the play progresses, Loke works to fuel the enmity between Hother and Balder, Hother being given further assistance in the form of special spears that are prepared on stage by three dark, dancing and singing magical Valkyrier (echoing Shakespeare's Witches). The play ends when Balder accidentally falls on another magical spear that Hother has been planning to use on himself after his life had previously been spared by Balder (thereby causing dishonour).

In terms of production, the 1779 staging of *Balders død* was the late eighteenth-century equivalent of a modern Hollywood blockbuster, with its striking visual scenes and tableaux (starting with an image of Thor and Balder looking over the landscape of Norway) which would have engraved themselves into the memories of all theatre-goers. Several scenes are worth particular mention in this context, the first being the initial appearance of the *valkyrjur* as singing shield-maidens at the start of the second act (Ewald 1814–16: III, 28). The visual aspects of the production (set, costumes and style of acting) are supported not only by details contained in the contemporary production notebooks (Marker and Marker 1975: 103–04; Krogh 1932: 253–68) but also in Peter

[10] It might be borne in mind that interest in the works of Shakespeare was growing at this time in Scandinavia (influences which are especially apparent in Oehlenschläger's work [see below]). It might also be noted that the first part of Goethe's *Faust* was not to appear until 1808. See further Marker and Marker 1975: 109–10.

Cramer's drawings of Hother and Nanna; the three *valkyrjur*, and the final tableaux which accompany the early editions of Ewald's work.[11] All of these elements support the idea that some attempt was made to have the sets as historically accurate as possible. Archaeological knowledge was nonetheless still highly limited, and classical influences evidently still strong, and particularly on the ideas of the costume designer, Nicolai Abildgaard (1743–1809).[12]

Similar visual imagery and interest can be seen in another Danish work drawing on aspects of the Nordic pagan world that was staged six years later. *Gorm den Gamle: Et heroisk Skuespiel* was written by Birgitte Catharine Boye (1742–1824) in 1781, printed in 1784 and performed on the occasion of King Christian VII's birthday in 1785. It draws on Book IX of Saxo, Snorri's *Heimskringla*, Tacitus's *Germania* and other historical works of the time (like that of Suhm, noted earlier) (further Krogh 1932: 268–74).

As noted above, Ewald's introduction of the story of Baldr and Loki to the theatrical world was to have long-term international influence, supported by the ever-increasing availability of the original materials (and not least the eddic poems) in translation. The most immediate effect was to be seen in 1790, when the English poet and scholar Frank L. Sayers (1763–1817) published his 'The Descent of Frea: A Masque in Two Parts' as part of the author's *Dramatic Sketches of the Ancient Mythology* (Sayers 1803: 1–29). As Sayers notes, the work was written under the direct influence of a German translation of Ewald's *Balders død* (Ewald 1788) and Grey's *Descent of Odin* (1761).[13] Totally dialogic in form, and replacing Hermóðr with Frea, 'Goddess of Beauty', the first act of

[11] For the three images, see Ewald 1815: between pp. 24 and 25; between 34 and 35; and between 96 and 97, and Krogh 1932: 254. An oil painting of the final tableaux by Cramer can be seen at <http://www.smk.dk/udforsk-kunsten/soeg-i-smk/#/detail/KMS4070> (accessed 10 June 2017).

[12] For details of the performance of this and other plays at Det kongelige Teater (from 1748 to the present), see the excellent database of performances at <http://www.litteraturpriser.dk/1850t/t1850kgl1.htm>. For other Danish theatres, see <http://www.litteraturpriser.dk/1850t/t1850dato.htm> (both sites accessed 10 June 2017). The database also provides invaluable contextual material relating to the other kinds of dramas appearing on the stage at the time.

[13] Since Sayers read German, there is also a faint possibility that he was encouraged by Friedrich David Gräter's *Nordische Blumen* (1789), dedicated to Suhm, which contained a collection of 'Eddic dialogues' (91–252) made up of new translations of *Þrymskviða*, *Harbarðsljóð* (preceded by details of the setting), *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Hymiskviða*, *Skírnismál* and *Lokasenna*, the last of which starts with a cast list, indicating that Gräter regarded the poem as having been a play (see Gräter 1789: 209–33).

the masque begins in Hel with a monologue by Balder, here 'God of the Sun'; all indications are that his death has brought darkness to the outside world (Sayers 1803: preceding the play; no page numbers). The speech provides a useful indication of the way in which people understood the pagan Hel at this time. With its strong element of ritual, and its emphasis on Balder's apparent role as God of the Sun, one can imagine why this work, alongside that of Ewald, might have had influence on the numerous German works about Baldr that were to follow in coming years.

Ewald's powerful influence is most clearly discernible in the work of the author most closely associated with dramas with Old Norse themes during the period in question, Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850). Unlike F. D. Gräter (see note 20 below), the young Oehlenschläger (cf. Chapter 5.2 above) could see no evidence of a dramatic tradition within the original eddic poems, stating in the foreword to his early *Nordiske digte* (1807) that *hele den gamle nordiske Litteratur viser intet Spoer af noget dramatisk Digt, med mindre man vil regne de lyriske Dialog-Fragmenter i Sæmunds Edda derhen* ('none of the Old Nordic literature shows any signs of dramatic poetry unless we wish to include the lyrical dialogue fragments of Sæmundar Edda') (Oehlenschläger 1807: xv–xvi). In spite of this, like Messenius, Dalin, Gustav III, Leopold, Valerius, Pram, Bredal, Brun and Ewald before him, Oehlenschläger (who had some theatrical experience in his youth) felt a need to draw on all the original Nordic materials available in order to build up a new body of Nordic plays that could compete with both the classical and neoclassical forms of drama that he had grown up seeing in the *Danish* theatre. A brief review of the body of his work relating to early Nordic themes nonetheless effectively demonstrates the gradual transition from mythology to history that was to take place in Nordic theatre during his lifetime, and especially after his death (partly as authors like Ibsen, Strindberg and Bjørnson attempted to avoid evoking and repeating the grandiose style of the playwright's work which had made such an impression on Northern drama): In chronological order, the works were as follows: *Hakon Jarl hin Rige: Et Sørgespil* (1805; published and premiered in 1808: see below); *Baldur hin gode: Et Mythologisk Sørgespil* (1806, published in 1808: see below); *Palnatoke: Et Sørgespil* (1807; published 1809, in which a binding oath is sworn on a wooden image of *Freiers hellige Galt* ('Freyr's holy boar'): Oehlenschläger 1809: 182 and 185); *Stærkodder: En Tragødie* (1811: see below); *Hagbarth og Signe: En Tragødie* (1815); *Fostbrødrene: En Tragødie* (1817; based on saga material); *Væringerne i Miklagaard: En Tragødie* (1826); *Langbarderne: En Tragødie* (1826); *Olaf den Hellige: En Tragødie* (1836); *Landet fundet og forsvundet: Et Nordisk Heltespil* (1846; dealing with the settlement of Iceland, and

starting with a prologue spoken by *Hlen Ægir, i Harnisk af Sølvskiel, med Koral krone, Tangskiæg og Baadshage* ('Hlen Ægir, in armour made of silver shells, with a crown of coral, a beard of seaweed and a boat hook'): Oehlenschläger 1901: 686); *Amleth: En Tragødie* (1847); and, finally *Kjartan og Gudrun: En Tragødie* (1847: based very loosely on *Laxdæla saga*).

Few of the later works place any focus on aspects relating to Old Nordic religion or mythology, over and above the occasional mention of the gods to provide historical colour. Of most interest in the present context are three of Oehlenschläger's earlier plays, *Hakon Jarl hin Rige*, *Baldur hin Gode* and *Stærkodder*. *Hakon Jarl hin Rige* (Oehlenschläger 1807: 233–423) was Oehlenschläger's first drama, composed in Germany while staying with the influential Henrik Steffens (1773–1845). Based on the events leading to the death of Hákon *jarl* described in *Heimskringla*, this play, like *Palnatoke*, focuses on historical events centring on the conflict between the pagan religion and Christianity, here reflected in the figures of the aging tragically flawed Hakon Hlade-Jarl (who has strong elements of Shakespearean anti-heroes like Macbeth and Richard III), and the young Olaf Tryggveson, who offers a potentially fruitful blend of the local heroic culture of the north and the new, more peaceful, Christian ideology coming from the south.

The second group of altar scenes in the play make up the larger part of Act IV, and culminate with Hakon sacrificing his young son Erling for victory (Oehlenschläger 1807: 376–85). The first scene ends with Hakon being given a golden horn that has been found in the ground where Olaf is planning to build his first local chapel, and is clearly modelled on the early Iron Age Gallehus horns which had been found in Jutland, in 1639 and 1734, and which had been stolen and melted down in 1802 (Oehlenschläger 1807: 359–61). In between this scene and the sacrifice itself are two further scenes which take place elsewhere; in these Olaf engages in a debate with a mysterious old one-eyed man in a hat (Auden, clearly Óðinn) about the nature of the two religions and the close links between the pagan religion and the environment (Oehlenschläger 1807: 363–70). The scene in question ends with Olaf and his priest Tangbrand departing to take part in Evensong, which the audience assumes is taking place at the same time as Hakon's evening sacrifice of Erling.

Drawing directly on Resen's edition of *Snorra Edda* rather than Saxo, and composed by Oehlenschläger at around the same period as the poem *Thors Reise* ('Thor's Journey'), *Baldur hin Gode* (Oehlenschläger 1807: 129–232) tapped into the growing flood of interest in the figure of Baldr and was the author's attempt to follow Ewald in creating a Danish national mythological tragedy that could stand alongside, if not replace, the Greek tragedies on

which it is, in part, modelled.[14] If only because of its international influence and mythological theme, it is worth describing in some detail. Its initial setting, implied by the words of the play rather than directly described, is early morning in the woods of *Mimers Lund* where Balder, troubled by his dreams, meets his mother Frigga (who, as in earlier dramas is seen as a kind of Mother Earth). As in Sayer's masque, the various representatives of the elements then arrive, here in the shape of Odin (ruler of light), Freya (the air) and Ægir (the sea). All promise to protect Balder, including Mimer, who rules the sacred woods. The only site forgotten is a small island where mistletoe grows. Following the model of Greek tragedy, a chorus of forest elves now comments on what has happened.

The following scene introduces the figure of 'Asa-Loke' who has greater psychological depth, his bitter, confused yet charming and sympathetic character apparently modelled on other earlier embittered and envious theatrical figures such as Shakespeare's Richard III. Unsure of whether he is a god or a 'Jothun', Loke feels despised and humiliated by the other gods. These thoughts summon up the thunderous approach of the dark (silhouetted?) figure of Loke's alter-ego, Utgarde-Loke, who rises from depths of the earth and plays on Asa-Loke's misgivings in a role once again resembling the Witches or Marlowe's Mephistopheles (Oehlenschläger 1807: 150–61).[15] Inspired, Loke takes on the guise of a woman, and, approaching Frigga's altar (which is obviously part of the set), he throws himself to the ground and calls the goddess back down to earth. Frigga grants his request for mistletoe (to help cure the fever of a suitor) and leaves, after which the sun goes dark and a chorus of *svartalfer* ('dark elves')/ *dverger* ('dwarves') with names drawn from *Vǫluspá* appears through a mountain crevice shown on the stage (giving a further idea of the set). When Loke has ritually fashioned the twig into a spear and given it additional power with the blood of an innocent baby (killed on stage), a final chorus announces that the end of the world is approaching.

The next scene maintains the ritualistic atmosphere around the stage altar. A choir of humans enters, along with an *offerpræst* ('sacrificial priest') who calls on all the gods, including Freir on Sildetand, Aukathor on Guldkarm and Odin on Sleipnir. Balder enters with Bragi and Frigga, unconvinced that all is well, and a game is organized to demonstrate Balder's safety. A chorus singing in the forest then describes the various armoured gods as they pass (it is unclear whether their means of travel are shown on stage or merely described), each

[14] See Oehlenschläger 1807: iii–xxxiv on the genesis and ideology of these works.

[15] Interestingly enough, Oehlenschläger had regularly met Goethe in Weimar in 1806, when he was finishing the first part of his *Faust* (published in 1808).

playfully trying a weapon against Balder: Odin throws Gugner, Aukathor Miølner, Freir his sword, and Freya a rose. Amidst the laughter of the gods, Loke then convinces blind Hødur to throw the mistletoe spear, thereby killing him. The scene ends with the chorus and a Herald describing the different reactions of the gods to Balder's death and the funeral, and asking for a volunteer to enter Niflheim to bring him back (here on behalf of Freya). The audience hears that Hermod has entered the mountain.

The second part of Oehenschläger's play (as with Sayers's work) takes place in shadowy Niflheim. Modguder, the guardian of the gate, announces to Hel the arrival of Hermod (Oehlenschläger once again borrowing directly from original sources in his wording). A choir then sings in alliterative verse marking Hermod's approach, after which the visitor effectively describes for the audience the appearance and even the smells of his surroundings, noting, among other things, Hel's physical appearance on a throne of bones, with a further bone as a sceptre and a skull as a shield. In the ensuing conversation, Hel is effectively characterized as a powerful figure who enjoys her environment and who, like Loke, has psychological reasons for her bitterness (having been sent below by Odin on account of her ugly appearance). She sets the classical conditions that the whole world must shed tears for Balder if he is to be released. Balder, in a voice that echoes throughout the theatre, nonetheless believes that all is lost. Hermod leaves with Drupner, with a chorus of the dead commenting on how his presence has disturbed them, but how they must now return to sleep.

The final scene is set once again in Mimer's grove. When Heimdal tells of a single woman who has refused to grieve, Frigga announces that all is lost. Hermod enters and tells of Loke's capture and punishment (again keeping closely to the eddic sources) as Frigg walks bowed in silence. Bleakly facing a singing and dancing chorus which has come to celebrate at her altar, she informs them that there is no reason for joy. The play ends with the Chorus and a desperate Frigga mourning the loss of her son and announcing that as a result *Siunken i Grus er Midgards Stad!* ('Midgard has sunk into the dirt!') (Oehlenschläger 1807: 232).[16]

Baldur hin Gode was Oehlenschläger's only attempt to create Nordic mythology on stage. As noted above, from this time onwards, the playwright moved steadily away from the mythology and rituals of Old Nordic religion. In spite

[16] Later versions of the play end with an arrival of a 'Vala' who, echoing *Völuspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál*, tells of the coming of the new world in which Baldur and Hødur will return. Her prophecy ends with the additional suggestion that Baldur will turn 'Aukthor''s hammer into a cross: see Oehlenschläger 1901: 21.

of this, *Stærkodder* (1811: see Oehlenschläger 1812), based on Starkatherus's return to Denmark described in Saxo, Book VI, involves several interesting scenes which take place around *Thors Offersteen* ('Thor's sacrificial altar') in a forest (Oehlenschläger 1812: 8),[17] where Stærkodder encounters *Thors offergode* ('Thor's sacrificial priest'), who reminds him that in spite of all the achievements in his over-long life, Stærkodder has not made up for the murder of his king and friend earlier in his life (Oehlenschläger 1812: 16–21). In another scene, the melodramatic villain of the piece, Angantyr, king of Skåne, dies in the dark grave mound of his father Halfdan, trying to retrieve a sword and vainly fulfil a prophecy made by a *seidmand/ spaamand* ('magician/ clairvoyant'). The set description here provides us with some idea of how people at this time imagined grave mounds: *Den Indre af en Jordhule. I Baggrunden en Askekrukke i en Fordybning i Væggen; oven den hænger hans Vaaben og Hærklæder* ('The inside of a hole in the earth. In the background is a pot containing ashes in an inset in the wall; over it hang his weapons and armour') (Oehlenschläger 1812: 109–12). In a later scene at the start of Act IV, the treacherous wife of King Ingild, Thusnelda (also called Svarteham), who has previously called on her gods Thuiskon and Hertha (Oehlenschläger 1812: 70), appears in firelight clad in *Skarlagen med Hielm og Pandser af blanke Staal, et Spyd i Haanden* ('scarlet, with a helmet and armour of shining steel, a spear in her hand'), accompanied by her maidens with armed warriors on either side of her, in front of Angantyr's burning pyre. As part of the funerary ritual depicted on stage which involves the group singing in verse that bears some resemblance to *fornyrðislag*, Thusnelda waves an oaken twig around a gold cup containing Angantyr's ashes as she calls for revenge (Oehlenschläger 1812: 118–22).

As noted above, Oehlenschläger was to have lasting influence on Nordic theatre, but his works, like Valerius's *Balder* (1819), noted earlier, also have to be seen as the high-water mark in the use of Old Nordic myth and other pagan religious motifs in Nordic drama. In Germany, however, works like those of Ewald and Oehlenschläger had sown seeds of a completely new popular dramatic movement centring round the figures of Baldr, Sigurðr and Vǫlundr, which was to reach a peak in the early twentieth century. They were to be closely connected with attempts to recreate the rituals of the pagan period which an increasing number of scholars were beginning to believe often had strong dramatic elements (see further Chapter 5.1 of Volume II).

[17] The probability is that the altar again took the shape of a Stone Age dolmen or standing stone.

While earlier German playwrights such as Klopstock had made use of elements involving Old Germanic and Nordic ritual and mythology, the main local forerunner of the theatrical wave that was about to wash over Germany was Baron Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843) who had been directly influenced by the ideas of August Wilhelm Schlegel, Wilhelm Grimm and Joseph Görres (Haymes 2012: 26–27). Fouqué's key works *Sigurd der Schangentödter* (1808),[18] the related Völsunga plays that followed it (*Sigurds Rache* and *Aslaug*, 1810), and his own *Baldur der Gute: Ein Heldenspiel* (published with *Helgi*, a trilogy of plays based on the eddic heroes Helgi Hjörvarðsonar, Helgi Hundingsbani and Helgi Haddingjaskati in 1818) were to have long-term influences on German playwrights, especially Wagner, as Edward Haymes has noted (2012: 25–36). Most innovative was the fact that many of Fouqué's plays (especially those dealing with Sigurðr and Helgi) were based on Icelandic rather than Danish or German sources, *Sigurd der Schangentödter* being based on material from Þormóður Torfason's *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* (1711) and Resen's *Edda Islandorum* (1665) (see Haymes 2012: 28–29), while for *Baldur der Gute* and the Helgi plays, Fouqué could draw on translations by von Hagen and Grimm (from 1812 and 1815 respectively) of the mythological poems of the Edda (Haymes 2012: 33–34).

Sigurd der Schangentödter covers the eventful story of Sigurd ranging from his killing of Faffner to his own eventual murder by Guttorm, followed by the death of Brynhildis and the joint cremation of Sigurd and Brynhildis, with Fouqué keeping comparatively closely to the Icelandic sources (see further Haymes 2012: 29–33). The play also includes appearances by Óðinn in the guise of an old man; and the three Norns (Wurdur, Werdandi and Skuld) who end the play with speeches about the past, present and future.

Baldur der Gute proved to be particularly influential in Germany. Like Ewald's play, it represented an attempt to blend the historical account of Baldr's death given in Saxo (which it keeps to closely) with that presented in Snorri's *Prose Edda* and the eddic poems. Fouqué's work added strength to the already increasingly popular idea (earlier suggested in Sayers's masque) that Baldr was a demigod of the sun connected with peace and harmony, who is capable of bringing a desert back to life (Fouqué 1818a: 8, 53, 134, 148–49, 159, 164–71).[19] The play begins with a *Vorspiel* in which the *Asahelden* ('Æsir heroes'), Odin,

[18] The work was later republished with *Sigurds Rache* ('Sigurd's Revenge') and *Aslauga* in Fouqué 1810.

[19] I would like to express my gratitude to Michael Adler for his help with the text of this play.

Hertog der Asahelden ('Duke of the Æsir heroes'), Frigga, Baldur der Gute, Thor, Bragi, Tyr, Loki, Freia and Iduna arrive by ship on the coast of Sweden, bringing salvation and culture to the land of Gewar, his daughter Nanna and fosterson Hother.[20] As in the plays by Ewald and Oehenschläger, Loki's evil and plans for revenge are seen as having roots in his bitterness about his treatment by the other Æsir. Of particular interest is Fouqué's innovative suggestion that Hela (who has been exiled beneath the earth by the Æsir and has followed them to Sweden by means of underground tunnels) sees herself as having the right to become Baldur's bride, something her father, Loki, plans to help her achieve (Fouqué 1818a: 11–12). The play is full of spectacular scenic effects which include the ship arrival, two funeral pyres, several fights, a brief performance of *Gylfaginning* (Fouqué 1818a: 122–28)[21] and a scene in which Freia takes off in a colourful dress of feathers given her by an Indian sorceress (Fouqué 1818a: 177–78). It ends with all the gods coming to Baldur's funeral at the *Garten auf Ida* (Iðavöllr), where his now-drooping *Goldfruchtbaum* ('Golden fruit-tree'), here replacing Yggdrasill, rises in front of his grave mound. As in Valerius's *Balder* play, Bifrost can be seen in the background. Nanna dies with Baldur, who, mortally wounded by Hother, has been brought in on a shield, thereby thwarting Hela's plans (Baldur and Nanna now being enthroned together in the world of death). The couple then appear to the audience amidst the flames on the grave mound, defying prior expectations when they rise to Walhall together, as Odin bestows a final blessing on the realm of the North.

As will become apparent in the chapter on the development of drama with Nordic mythological themes in Volume II, Baldur's ascent to Walhall in the climax of a German play was symbolic in more ways than one as a summary of the developments described in the chapter above. Arising out of a drama with firm roots in eighteenth-century Gothicism (the idea of the travels of the Goths and Æsir which had formed a background for the works of Messenius, Gustav III, Leopold and Valerius), it also announced the formal arrival of Baldur (and Ragnarök) in German theatrical culture, a development that would take interesting (if increasingly ominous) shapes over the course of the following one and a half centuries.

[20] Niord has the role of a boatman who brings external news to the Æsir.

[21] Gewar visits Odin in disguise to ask about the nature of 'Walhall'. Among other things, he is told about the rule of the *Allvater* ('All-father'), a figure different to Odin, who will rule after the world ends in flames. It is stressed that the *Asahelder* are not themselves gods, only related to a species from Walhall. Their role is to interpret for humans the riddles and images they receive from the gods.

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6.2.1 – Painting and Sculpture in Denmark

Bo Grandien†
Translated from the Swedish by Inga-Lena Angström Grandien

'No one has seen the Nordic world of gods, and no one will ever be able to see it. Art cannot accomplish the impossible; it is not possible to reshape Valhalla into Olympia' (Baden 1820: 6). With those assertive words, Thorkel Baden, Secretary of the Academy of Arts in Copenhagen, rejected all attempts to visualize Nordic myths in images, dismissing them as confusing and incoherent, unusable by the imagination. It was different with Greek mythology, he said. It was possible to take that as a model, since it addressed itself to the whole learned world instead of to a single people.

Baden's declaration mirrors a longstanding conflict of opinions that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century, a time when Nordic artists attempted to visualize the old mythology and saga literature. The problem was also discussed theoretically. Some critics thought it was possible, others stated the contrary. In practice it turned out that the artists, however much they tried, would hold on to a classical model; that is, they tried to turn Valhalla into Olympia. This is really not surprising, because these works of art belonged principally to a cultural tradition with deep roots: the union of the Northern with the classical. When Icelandic texts began to be published in the seventeenth century, they were presented with parallel texts in Latin for the benefit of all the learned public; Latin still kept its position as the learned, interna-

Bo Grandien (1932–2014) was a writer, poet, and Professor of the History of Art at Stockholm University. His work focused on how the past is represented in the visual arts of the nineteenth century: *Drömmen om medeltiden*, 1974; *Drömmen om renässansen*, 1978; *Vindruvans glöd — nygöticistiskt i tanke konst och miljö under 1800-talet*, 1987.

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tional language. This practice continued through the whole of the eighteenth century and far into the nineteenth. It is no wonder that classicism also crept into the attempts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to render Nordic mythology in the visual arts. Despite good intentions the result was rather a division than a harmonic fusion.

In the eighteenth century Copenhagen was a centre for Nordic research with emphasis on the older periods. There lived the medievalist Jakob Langebek, the librarian Rasmus Nyerup and not least the historian Peter Frederik Suhm. Both Langebek and Suhm edited Icelandic manuscripts, and both were members of the Arnamagnæan Commission that was established in 1772. With the intention of retelling Nordic mythology for a broader circle of readers, Suhm published a booklet (Suhm 1771) about Odin and the mythology of the heathen world (see further Chapter 8.1 below). The interest in Norse myth and religion rubbed off on literary circles, among them the German writers who resided in the town, whose dominant figure was Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. To his circle belonged the young Danish poet Johannes Ewald, who, after his first piece of work in the Old Norse genre, the prose tragedy *Rolf Krage* (1771), wrote the Norse drama *Balders død*, which had its premiere in 1775.[1] The play is interesting in the present connection since it inspired several artists to make sketches and décor suggestions before a new and more lavish performance in 1779. (These are discussed and illustrated by Terry Gunnell in Chapter 6.1.1 above.) Two of the most significant artists involved were the sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt and the artist Nicolai Abildgaard, who, besides his interest in neoclassicism, was one of the first artists to have been taken with Ossianic Romanticism.

Abildgaard was also in the vanguard of those who attempted to visualize scenes from Scandinavian mythology in images. This occurred with the strange and often reproduced small shimmering colour sketch he made in 1775 or 1776 in Rome (Figure 6.2.1.1). The motif is taken from *Gylfaginning*'s account of the creation: the giant Ymir feeding on milk from the cow Audhumbla. There is a spark of genius in Abildgaard, without which he probably would not have dared to venture on such a risky motif. According to *Gylfaginning*, Ymir was a frost giant who was formed at the beginning of time from the primal ice of Niflheim, where it met with the warm air from Muspell and melted in Ginnungagap. He survived by drinking milk from the four teats of the primeval cow Audhumbla.

[1] On Ewald, *Rolf Krage* and *Balders død*, see further Chapters 5.2 and 6.1.1 in this volume.

Figure 6.2.1.1. Nicolai Abildgaard, 'Ymir Feeds from the Cow Audhumla'. *c.* 1777. KMS 3397. Photograph courtesy of Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen © SMK Photo.

She lived off the salty Niflheim ice. Through her licking, Buri, the male ancestor of the Æsir gods, was born over a period of three days. First there appeared the hair of a man, then a man's head and on the third day the whole man.

How was all this to take place in just one picture? All Abildgaard could do was to give it a try. His painting is dominated by the large, dark cow that stands out against a background of white floods of milk and red rainbows to the right and a frost-green twilight sky to the left. The cow licks the stones seemingly absent-mindedly, with her matted tail dangling between her legs. On the lightly vaulted ground lies a naked, muscular and well-nourished young man — Abildgaard admired Michelangelo. The young man is Ymir, sucking from the cow's teats. The gods' ancestor Buri is on his way up from one of the stones and greets the world with his arm, which is raised with an open palm. Furthest down on the ground in the left corner there is a dark face which must belong to the ancestor of the frost giants, recently born from the feet of Ymir.

The difficulties of this representation lie partly in the fact that the artist, to be able to render the whole of creation history, has had to compress too much content into one image, partly in the fact that, despite the audacity of the attempt, the image inevitably veers between the sublime and its opposite. It points to a difficulty that was never really mastered during the long period art would wrestle with this group of subjects, namely, to depict the implausible in a reasonably plausible way (Johansen 1907: 49–51; Grandien 1987: 38–40; Nordhagen 1992: 128–29).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a theoretical discussion in Germany about the applicability of Norse mythology to contemporary literature. This was also discussed in Denmark, where, in 1800, the University of Copenhagen launched a prize essay competition on the subject of whether literature in Scandinavia would benefit if Norse mythology were to be introduced instead of the Greek. As a parallel, the corresponding possibilities for the visual arts were discussed. The debate was sparked by a publication from 1792 by Friedrich David Gräter entitled *Ideen über die Brauchbarkeit der nordischen Mythologie für die redenden und zeichnenden Künste* ('Ideas on the Usefulness of Nordic Mythology for the Communicative and Graphic Arts'), published in *Bragur* in 1802 as a response to the University's prize question (on Gräter, see Chapter 6.2.4 below). In this he advocated the usefulness of Nordic mythology in both fields. He reckoned that lyrical-epical and comical scenes were best suited to be represented in images. He also discussed the question of whether a mythology has its best artistic expression when it is still vivid in people's minds or if this development occurs first long afterwards. Gräter took the latter view. While religion was still alive the artist had no freedom and, for example, had to depict Bacchus in his temple on Lemnos with horns. But when pressure had lifted and one could look at the whole from a distance and a certain liberty had been introduced, art was allowed to develop freely and Bacchus could be depicted without horns. So it was also with Norse mythology (Grandien 1992: 115).

A direct reference to Gräter was made by the Danish theologian, later professor, Jens P. Møller, who had answered 'yes' to the University's prize essay question and in 1812 published a pamphlet entitled *Om den nordiske Mythologies Brugbarhed for de skjønne tegnende Kunster* ('On the Usefulness of Nordic Mythology for the Visual Arts'). Møller reckoned that the Nordic sagas were suitable as motifs, but it is nevertheless apparent that he was unable to free himself at heart from the opinion that classical antiquity, in terms of spiritual loftiness, simplicity and artistic superiority, must serve as a guiding rule for the arts 'till the end of times'. He also warned of the abnormities that

would result if one tried to depict the unnatural. One could profit by reading of Starkodder's (Starkaðr's) six arms in Christen Pram's lyric heroic epic, but to see them in a painting would be quite another thing. However, Møller appreciated the attempts of Danish art to try to make itself more popular by mirroring the history of its own nation — this would later prove to be a viable road. One way to do this was to draw on a repository of motifs, allegories and symbols from Norse mythology that the contemporary public was already familiar with. Møller was, however, convinced that the Nordic material would continue to be permeated by the Greek spirit — the basis of art (Grandien 1987: 43).

Adam Oehlenschläger had also answered the University's prize question positively with the argument that Norse mythology was not as hackneyed as that of classical antiquity.[2] Furthermore, it emanated from one's own country and should therefore be better suited as the subject of national poetry. In 1802 his poem *Guldhornene* ('The Golden Horns') was published, and this immediately created a wave of enthusiastic interest in the past history of the North. The poem also meant a new orientation in Oehlenschläger's own writing, from the dry, lightly sentimental tone in Ewald's work to a deeper way of looking at the past. His *Nordiske Digte* (1807) contains three dramatic poems, intended to be performed as plays. In the spirit of Romanticism, they are held together by one common idea and create a cycle. In the first, *Thors Reise till Jotunheim* ('Thor's Journey to Jotunheim'), the still unspoiled world of the Æsir is described. Thereafter its crisis is told in the tragedy *Baldur Hin Gode* ('Baldr the Good'). The trilogy ends with the tragedy *Hakon Jarl Hin Rige* ('Jarl Hákon the Powerful'), which deals with the fall of the pre-Christian religion. In Oehlenschläger's *Nordens Guder* (1819) the whole of the mythology is summed up in a long sequence of songs.

The patriotic sentiments that had been aroused in the Danes by the political and military events of the early nineteenth century provide an important background to the growing interest in Nordic themes and Nordic mythology. In 1801 the English fleet attacked the inferior Danish fleet in the waters off Copenhagen. The next crisis occurred when England demanded that the Danish fleet surrender. When the Danes refused, the English invaded Sjælland and besieged Copenhagen, which, during a couple of days at the beginning of September, was under devastating bombardment. Thereafter Denmark went over to the Napoleonic side, something that had serious consequences. At the

[2] On Oehlenschlager's use of Norse mythology, see the detailed treatment by Lise Præstgaard Andersen in Chapter 5.2 and by Gunnell in Chapter 6.1.1.

Peace of Kiel, Denmark had to cede Norway to Sweden. At the same time the country had entered into a deep economic crisis, from which it did not recover until the 1820s.

The second person to give a new impetus to the interest in Scandinavian mythology at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the poet and preacher N. F. S. Grundtvig (see Chapters 8.1 below and 1.1 of Volume II). External events influenced him deeply, and in the poem *Maskeradballet i Danmark* he expressed his despair at his compatriots' lack of fighting spirit and patriotic seriousness even after the bombardment. He reminded them that they nevertheless stemmed from the Nordic race of heroes. Grundtvig imagined himself hearing from the depths a dirge that the North would be awoken from its sleep, and he was ready to be the awakener. This he did with the book *Nordens mytologi*, a result of his *Edda* studies, which was published in 1808.

Oehlenschläger's and especially Grundtvig's patriotic attitudes are typical of the sentiments that had arisen around Europe in those countries that in one way of another had been affected by the upheavals following the Napoleonic wars. Their losses created a need for a patriotic arousal, and, as an inspiration for the future, people went searching in the past for eras during which their country enjoyed periods of greatness. In Germany this was the Middle Ages; in Denmark and Sweden, the past history of the North.

Oehlenschläger tried to interest visual artists in the Nordic past. Strengthened by his success with *Guldhornene*, he turned to the Academy of Art in Copenhagen in 1804 and asked to borrow a room for a series of public lectures on Nordic poetry from the oldest to the present time. He also planned to invite young artists to attend so that they would learn about Nordic mythology. Most members of the Academy were positive about the idea, but for various reasons the lectures never took place (Salling 1992: 80). The Academy's interest in this pedagogical task seems thereafter to have cooled off, and it was not until 1814 that the rule that the professor of history should also teach Nordic mythology in addition to his other tasks was introduced into the regulations. If necessary, the Academy could prescribe subjects from Danish sagas or mythology as an entrance test for aspiring members. When in 1816 Carl Wilhelm Eckersberg returned from his study years in France and Italy, he was elected to the Academy and given the subject 'Balder's death' (Figure 6.2.1.2) for his reception piece, from specific pages in Rasmus Nyerup's *Edda* edition of 1808 and Grundtvig's book on Nordic mythology. In the foreground Balder is lying dead, stretched out on his back with the arrow still in his chest. The dead body is watched by the sorrowful Odin on his throne, surrounded by the other gods and goddesses. He sits with his javelin beside him and is dressed

Figure 6.2.1.2. C. W. Eckersberg, *Balders død* ('The Death of Balder'). 1817. Oil on canvas. The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the Academy Council, Copenhagen. Photograph: Frida Gregersen.

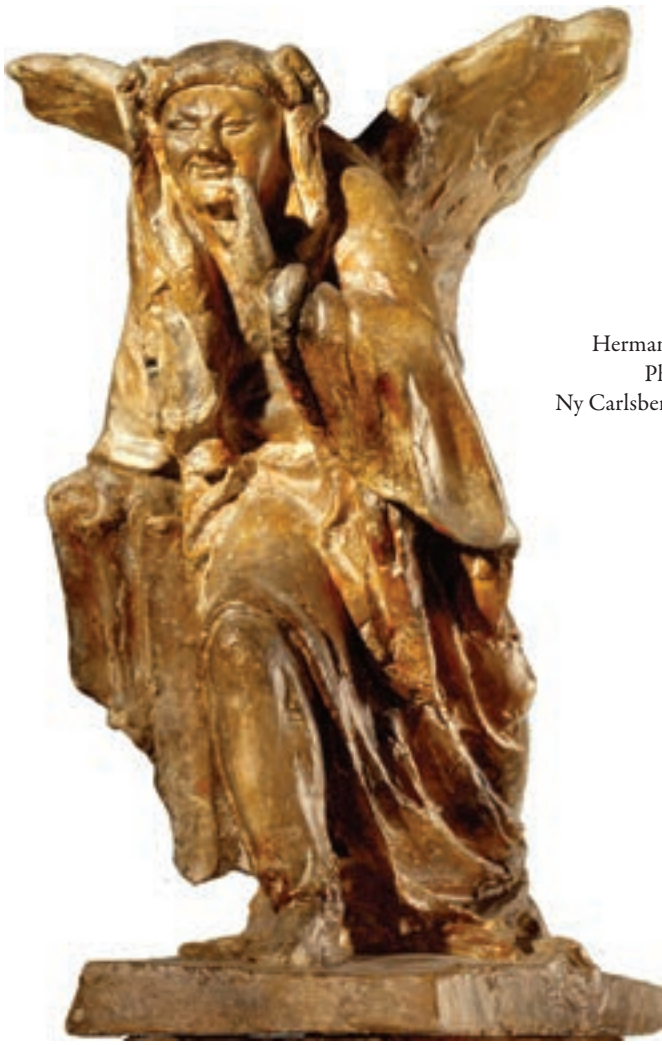

Figure 6.2.1.3.
Herman Ernst Freund, *Loke*. 1822.
Photograph by permission of
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

in a floor-length mantle over a white, also floor-length robe. The figures are totally classical except that Eckersberg has tried to give the clothes some kind of Nordic decoration. Vagn Poulsen mentions the painting in *Dansk Kunsthistorie* (1972a: 294–95), with the short comment that the dominant quality is its unintended comedy. It was painted in 1817 and the following year Eckersberg was made professor at the Academy.

After the intervention of the Academy's president, Prince Christian Frederik, regular lectures on the oldest literature and mythology of Scandinavia were arranged for the first time in 1819. They were given by the Icelander

Finnur Magnússon (Finn Magnusen), *Edda*-translator and titular professor at the University of Copenhagen. A benefit for the artists was that Magnusen also taught Nordic archaeology. He was, however, met with opposition, something that led to a long and even internationally noticed debate in 1820–21 for and against the worth of Nordic mythology as subject matter for the visual arts. Emma Salling (1992) has thoroughly described the various turns in the debate, and therefore only the outlines will be given here. One of those who started it was the previously mentioned Academy secretary Torkel Baden, who had earlier been professor of classical philology in Kiel. He opposed the views of both Gräter and Møller and in 1820 published a small book with the telling title *Om den Nordiske Mythologies Ubrugbarhed for de skjønne Kunster* ('On the Lack of Usefulness of Nordic Mythology for the Visual Arts'). It was there that he made the bold dismissal that introduces this chapter. He looked upon the Nordic gods as a 'concoction' of Greek mythology and the Bible, and disapproved of the explanation that they could be interpreted as literal incarnations of natural forces (Salling 1992: 80–85, 94–96).

The history painter Christian Faedder Høyer adopted the same attitude as Baden. One of his main objections was that the Nordic myths could lure artists to idolatry or that they would waste time and talent on the visualization of phenomena that had already been banned when Christianity was introduced; an argument, his critics pointed out, he could very well have used against Graeco-Roman mythology, whose use in the arts he had defended. The two sides stood against one another, and in the heat of the battle both took the opportunity to use the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen as a weapon in support of their opinion. Thorvaldsen resided in Copenhagen in 1819–20 for the decoration of Vor Frue Kirke and was asked to comment on this matter, but his answer was so evasive that it could be interpreted to everyone's advantage. Finn Magnusen defended himself successfully and as time went on public opinion turned to a general acceptance of Scandinavian mythology as a suitable subject for the visual arts. In 1821 the battle was over, and some years later both Torkel Baden and Høyer had to leave the Academy. Despite the outcome of the battle, the atmosphere was still tense, and it was only in 1826 that the Academy was presented with a draft of what would become the largest composition with motifs from Nordic mythology in Danish nineteenth-century art, the sculptor Hermann Ernst Freund's sketch for the Ragnarök-frieze for the castle of Christiansborg (see Poulsen 1972b: 312–17).

In 1817, at more than thirty years of age, Freund had finished his studies at the Academy by winning its large gold medal, which immediately led him to set off on a study trip to Italy. His aim was to study classical sculpture, and

in 1818 he was well received in Rome by the much admired Thorvaldsen, who saw his capability and gave him the responsibility for looking after his large studio during his voyage to Copenhagen in 1819. Before his departure from Copenhagen, Freund had been given the impression that he was the one who would be given the task of making the twelve statues for Vor Frue Kirke, but instead it was Thorvaldsen who was persuaded to undertake the mission; in Copenhagen he was celebrated as a prince. For Freund, who had faithfully taken care of Thorvaldsen's study until his return in 1820, the information was a disappointment. He was not alone in believing that the task had been reserved for him. Both Prince Christian Fredrik and Jonas Collin, an official and a generous benefactor of the arts, thought that Freund ought to receive compensation.

Collin then had the idea of announcing a sculpture competition with subjects from Nordic mythology. Freund was invited to participate, and in this field he could be guaranteed to avoid competition from Thorvaldsen. The prince wrote an encouraging letter to him, and Collin sent him Oehlenschläger's *Nordens Guder*, some songs from Finn Magnusen's translation of the Poetic Edda and some of Grundtvig's writings. Freund was filled with enthusiasm and sent in twelve sketches in the shape of small clay statuettes and a relief 'Mimer and Balder consulting the Norns'. He was awarded a prize for a statuette of Odin and for the relief.

Freund represented Odin sitting in his comfortable throne chair with his left hand resting on his javelin and the right one resting on the frame of the chair. On the back of the chair are his ravens, and two wolves lie at Odin's feet. But apart from these attributes it is difficult to find anything Nordic in the representation. The figure is classical, and the foot-long robe leaves the left-hand side of the chest bare. The god might just as well have been Zeus. Just as classical in conception was the relief, extant only in the shape of a fragment of a later copy. In the middle one of the Norns, with outstretched wings, turns naked towards the spectator. The other Norns are depicted in various positions — only a few details in their dresses may direct one's thoughts towards the world of early Scandinavia — and furthest to the right there is old Mimer with a beard and young Balder, also heroically naked. Of the twelve statuettes only Odin and Loki remain. Posterity has taken notice of the latter (Figure 6.2.1.3), which, although only twenty centimetres high, is considered an important piece of work in Danish nineteenth-century art. The reason is that it seems to vibrate with life and is totally unclassical. It portrays the intrigue-maker of the gods as he approaches kneeling and ingratiating, with his chin in his left hand and a sly or sardonic smile on his lips, totally in accordance with the role Oehlenschläger and Grundtvig had given him in Nordic mythology.

Freund had been taken with the subject and wanted to continue on a larger scale. He dreamed of representing the whole of Nordic mythology in an image-frieze of the same kind as Thorvaldsen's Alexander-frieze from 1812, but four times as big. The Alexander-frieze was meant as homage to Napoleon and put up in the Quirinal Palace in Rome; a model for that had been the Parthenon-frieze in Athens. Freund thought that a suitable place for his own frieze would be some large salon in Christiansborg, which was being rebuilt in the 1820s in accordance with plans by Christian Frederik Hansen; the old castle had burned down in 1794. Collin became Freund's spokesman in Copenhagen and managed to interest the commission that led the rebuilding in this matter. But they could only offer a small room, the so-called Parole Chamber, for the frieze. As a consequence, Freund had to cut its length to a fifth of what he had planned. He chose to concentrate his representation on Ragnarök, depicted as an apocalyptic clash between the gods and the giants.

Once again Oehlenschläger — with *Volvens spådom* ('The Prophecy of the Völva') — and the Poetic Edda served as inspiration. While still in Rome, Freund started to make sketches for the relief in the form of clay models. These were drawn by the German painter D. W. Lindau, whose drawings of the models were exhibited in Rome, Munich and Stuttgart before they arrived in Copenhagen in 1826. There the castle's building committee first showed them to the experts Finn Magnusen and Jens P. Møller, then to the Academy of Arts. All were positive, although the Academy rightly pointed out that Freund had not been completely able to free himself from the Greek heritage. Freund was thereafter formally given the task and was called back to Copenhagen from Rome in 1828, so that the work could be carried out there. At the same time he became a member of the Academy. As a reception piece he was to make a sculpture of Thor. This sculpture was delivered in 1829 and depicts the god sitting, with a string of stars around his neck, in an attentive pose by a tree trunk.

The frieze was put up in 1841, one year after Freund's death. According to Peter Johansen (1907: 55–58), Freund had sculpted only a section of the frieze, while the rest was made, based on Lindau's drawings, by Herman Vilhelm Bissen and many others. But the frieze did not last very long. When the new Christiansborg also burned down in 1884, a large part of the interior was destroyed, including Ragnarök, only fragments of which could be saved. In spite of this, it is possible to form quite a good conception of what it might have looked like. Lindau's suite of drawings still exists (on these see Chapter 6.2.4 below) as well as a suite of line drawings by Henrik Olrik from 1857. Furthermore a relative of Freund's, the sculptor Georg Christian Freund, made a copy of the frieze in 1888 which was intended to be put up in the new

Christiansborg. This never came to be, but the copy is kept in Statens Museum for Kunst, where it was restored in 1986. In the last-mentioned year — two hundred years after the birth of Freund — it was exhibited in the museum, together with the publication of an illustrated catalogue with a text by Kaspar Monrad (1986: 5–30), who was also responsible for the exhibition.

The Ragnarök-frieze has been called one of the masterpieces of the Danish 'Golden Age' and the only larger piece of work that was totally devoted to Nordic mythology. It is, however, indisputable that Freund had not yet totally managed to separate Valhalla from Olympia. Regardless of the subject matter, it is classical Greek figures that populate the frieze, and the mounted army of the valkyries is derived from the Parthenon. Freund was an admirer of classical antiquity, and his education had followed the classicist pattern. It is not known whether he saw this as a problem or not. But nowhere, as the Norwegian art-historian Per Jonas Nordhagen points out, is the conflict as obvious as in the representation of the Nordic ski-god Ullr, who, just like any Greek god, runs forward half naked on his skis; Nordhagen (1992: 131) adds that this is probably the first time since the Stone Age that skiing had been depicted in Nordic monumental art.

In 1832, in a thesis on the relationship of painting to sculpture in *Prometheus I*, Oehlenschläger mentioned the drawings for the frieze and once more made himself the spokesman for Nordic mythology as a subject of art. He argued that, although separated from us through centuries and the introduction of Christianity, it still stands closer to the hearts of Nordic artists than the Greek. The deep sentiment of the North gives the Nordic character a distinctive stamp, separate from Greek beauty. But Freund's frieze had influenced him. Although he described the gods in *Nordens Guder* as fully dressed and in armour, he now suggested that they could very well be depicted naked. Thor may perform in his full strength and daring with nothing more on than his strength-belt around his loins, and with his gloves and combat-hammer. Correspondingly he said that Freyja may flutter away with the roses of morning- and evening-light in her hand, dressed as a *bayadère* (Johansen 1907: 63).

After Freund's death in 1840 and that of Thorvaldsen in 1844, the prolific Herman Wilhelm Bissen became Denmark's leading sculptor. He was a classicist and preferred subjects from classical antiquity but could also take up national historical and Nordic motifs. The last is exemplified by the large sculpture group *Drottningens trappa* ('The Queen's stairway') in Christiansborg, which Bissen had made to order with Høyen as a force behind much of the conceptual programme. The group would consist of eighteen statues, alternating with Greek and Norse motifs. Bissen made the plaster models in 1849–57. The finished statues were put up in the palace, and sixteen of them were saved

in the fire of 1884. They are today in the Glyptotek in Copenhagen (Poulsen 1972c: 380–84). Seven of the statues have Nordic motifs, representing female figures from myth and legend.

The Danish national liberal movement had appeared as a counter-reaction to the German national movement, formed in 1830, which worked for the liberation of the duchies of Slesvig, Holsten and Ladenburg from Denmark. Both the German and the Danish movements had the same ideological basis, the nationalism which had grown strong during and after the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They built on the idea of Romanticism that groups of people, who in questions of culture, language and 'race' resembled one another, ought to unite more closely, independently of abstract political delimitations. Inbuilt in this concept were liberal demands for the civic rights of self-determination and popular freedom. In Denmark the goal was the struggle against royal absolutism.

With national liberalism, the attachment to the Scandinavia of the past gained a renewed political charge. When the movement, under the influence of the growing military threat from Germany, sought support and solidarity from the rest of Scandinavia, it received a strong response, especially from young Nordic intellectuals who were attracted by thoughts of fellowship and democracy. To impart legitimacy to the idealistic Scandinavianist movement, which in the beginning aroused the suspicion of those in power, a modern myth was created, namely, that Scandinavia had formed a unity in the past. This myth, based on a historically brittle foundation, became a symbol of the harmony that was to be revived after having been conspicuous by its absence over many centuries. That is one reason why the interest in the old history of Scandinavia had a renaissance around the middle of the nineteenth century, resulting in exultant Scandinavian students' meetings, poetry and art, soon also in the giving of names based on the old culture to people, steam ships, locomotives and streets, especially in Sweden.

In Copenhagen both Høyen and Grundtvig worked actively with lectures and teaching in order to interest Danish artists in subjects from the Nordic past. Finn Magnusen and the national liberal activist Orla Lehmann also engaged themselves, as well as Niels Matthias Petersen, a specialist in Icelandic, who gave lectures on Nordic mythology during the 1840s, which were published in book form in 1849. In 1845 Danish students arranged a Scandinavian festival in Copenhagen together with their visiting Norwegian and Swedish brothers. So many participants had signalled their attendance that it had to take place in the city's largest festivity hall, Skydebanen, 'the Shooting Range'. The walls were decorated with eleven paintings made with distemper on car-

Figure 6.2.1.4. Constantin Hansen, *Ægirs gæstebud* ('Ægir's Feast'). 1857. KMS 939. Photograph courtesy of Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen © SMK Photo.

toon, representing the Nordic gods in supernatural size. The paintings, which were a great success, were made jointly by the artists Jonas Thomas Lundbye, Peter Christian Skovgaard and Lorenz Frølich. For the first time, Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen writes (1972: 456), Odin, Thor, Heimdall and Brage had a Nordic appearance. They were not dressed in sweeping mantles like Freund's Ragnarök-gods; instead, they wore short-armed vests and fur coats. The bearded Thor sat on a bear's skin and carried an iron hat on his head. He was almost abnormally broad and heavy, had his eyes firmly directed at the spectator and gave the impression of Nordic primitive force. Heimdall was depicted blowing his horn, with a bird on his helmet. Odin was drawn by Frølich and Lundbye as sitting gloomily brooding on his throne, flanked by the ravens Huginn and Muninn. Every image was surrounded by dragon arabesques. Posterity can gain a good idea of what the paintings looked like because the whole series was published later that year as lithographs (Jörgensen 1972: 456).

Among the painters Constantin Hansen, although a confirmed classicist, was taken by the Grundtvigian national spirit. He had been a pupil of Eckersberg

and spent the years of 1833–34 in Rome. After his return he began to interest himself more and more in the mythology of the past; he was influenced by Petersen's lectures, learned Icelandic and studied costumes and archaeological objects in museums. In the Association for Nordic Art, founded by Høyen, he was able to see drawings of the Bayeux tapestry. For the first part of Adam Kristofer Fabricius's illustrated Danish history, Hansen drew twelve Nordic gods, certainly inspired by the paintings from the festival of 1845 but more classical and not as popular. His largest piece of work in this genre was, however, the painting *Aegirs gæstebud* ('Ægir's Feast') from 1857 (Figure 6.2.1.4), which had been commissioned in 1854 by Orla Lehmann. A predecessor to this painting was a distemper painting that Wilhelm Marstrand had made in 1849 for the celebration of Oehlenschläger's seventieth birthday.

The subject, also called 'Loki's Quarrel', is based on *Lokasenna*, one of the poems about the Norse gods in the Poetic Edda. It tells how, at a party thrown by the sea-deity Ægir, who also offers mead from a large brewing-kettle, Loki starts quarrelling with the other gods. He abuses one after the other until Thor finally has enough and threatens him with his axe (in the Old Norse poem, it is his hammer), at which Loki escapes. This was planned as a large and dramatic scene, and, to make it historically correct, experts were asked to check the sketches and to give their opinions. But in spite of all preparations, Hansen did not succeed in giving life to the dramatic subject. Instead of a wild party where the collective fury of the drinking-guests is embodied in Thor, Hansen has depicted what his contemporaries were already calling a quiet cultivated gathering with the guests in noble positions. Hansen never broke free from his classicist training, which pervades both the figure-style and the composition; he was himself disappointed with the result (Johansen 1907: 76; Jörgensen 1972: 456).

For the larger Danish public of the middle and the second half of the nineteenth century, it was probably Lorenz Frølich's many illustrations that shaped the standard image of what the Nordic gods might have looked like. At the age of nineteen he exhibited a drawing entitled *Frithiof og Ingeborg som barn* ('Frithiof and Ingeborg as Children') for Tegnér's saga,[3] and he was only twenty-five in 1845 when the gods' images for the Scandinavian festival in Skydebanen were painted. By then he had already lived in Germany for five

[3] Bishop Esaias Tegnér published a Swedish poetic paraphrase of the Old Icelandic *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* ('The Saga of Friðþjófr the Bold') in 1825. It became a runaway success in Scandinavia and the rest of Europe.

years and would first live in Italy from 1846 to 1851 and then in Paris for twenty-two years before he returned to his native country in 1873. During his years abroad, he devoted himself mainly to history painting and would only take up Nordic mythological motifs once again after his return. He made a ceiling painting for Frederiksborg Castle in 1882 showing 'Gefion ploughing Sjælland out of Sweden' (for this motif, see below) and a frieze depicting Danish Viking raids.

Frølich was best known as a prolific illustrator and a graphic artist with the past history of Scandinavia as his main subject. In 1874–79 *Nordens Guder* by Oehlenschläger was published with Frølich's drawings, in which the gods are depicted with great imagination in a series of lively narrative line drawings without painterly effects. In Frølich's depictions of the old world of gods, not much remains of the primal power in the image of Thor from 1845. With few exceptions the gods are here depicted in what could be characterized as a certain anecdotic lightness, and the often half-dressed characters reveal the still remaining classicist heritage. Like Freund Frølich depicts Thor totally naked — even without his strength-belt — in his fight with the Midgard Serpent. Valhalla has not yet managed to set itself free from Olympia.

Nordic subject matter slowly lost its political powers of attraction, and by the middle of the nineteenth century Danish art, influenced by international movements, found new directions. Besides Frølich there were only a few artists who devoted themselves to Norse mythological subjects, whose literal content made it possible for these subjects to survive only within the art of illustration. One of the painters was Ludvig Abolin Schou, who in the 1860s, after a long stay in Italy, came to interest himself in these subjects. He would often give his mythological scenes a strong erotic flavour. But the political undertones still remained. In 1863, one year before the fatal war between Denmark and Germany broke out, Frederik VII ordered a sculpture entitled 'Thor Rises from a chair' from Niels Valdemar Fjeldskov, a reference to the myth in which Thor has his hammer stolen from him by the giant Thrym and dresses up as Freyja in order to retrieve it. The sculpture shows Thor at the moment when he has retrieved his hammer. With an angry look on his face and wrinkled eyebrows, the hammer in his right hand and tightening the strength-belt with his left, he is ready to kill Thrym. His female dress has fallen off and shows a coat of ring mail underneath (Bencard and Friborg 1995: 82).

Frederik VII had the sculpture exhibited in Charlottenborg (the Academy of Art) with a quotation from one of Grundtvig's patriotic poems of 1817: *Vågner, vågner, danske helte!* | *Springer op og spaender baelte* ('Wake up, wake up, Danish

Figure 6.2.1.5. Carl J. Bonnesen, 'Thor's Battle against the Jotunns'. 1901. Reproduced with permission of Carlsberg Archives, Carlsberg Breweries.

brave men! | Buckle on your sword and glaive, then!)[4] This is thought to be an allusion to the tense situation between the countries. In 1867 — three years after the defeat by Germany and the loss of Slesvig — Orla Lehmann ordered a small sculpture group from Vilhelm Bissen, a son of Herman Wilhelm Bissen: 'The Binding of the Fenris Wolf'. The subject is the story of how the wolf will let itself be bound by the gods only if one of them put his hand in its mouth. Then Tyr, represented as the god of honour and courage, stretched out his right hand and laid it in the wolf's hungry mouth, and the wolf bit it off. The sculpture group shows Tyr, dressed as a Roman, standing stoically calm and controlled, at the moment when he has put his hand in the open mouth, at the same time as another god arduously draws the fetter Gleipner around the chest of the beast. This scene also had a political undertone: the North was still a shield against Germany but at the price of losing one limb — Slesvig (Bencard and Friborg 1995: 46).

Towards the turn of the nineteenth century the Symbolist movement would create a renewed interest in Nordic subject matter, but this time with most of the focus on early medieval times as it appeared in stories in popular literature. At the same time there were also within sculpture — and in the same Symbolist spirit — some strong efforts being made in relation to mythology

[4] *English Translations of Carl Nielsen's Songs* <http://img.kb.dk/ma/cn/forord/CNU_III_07_tr.pdf> [accessed 10 June 2017.

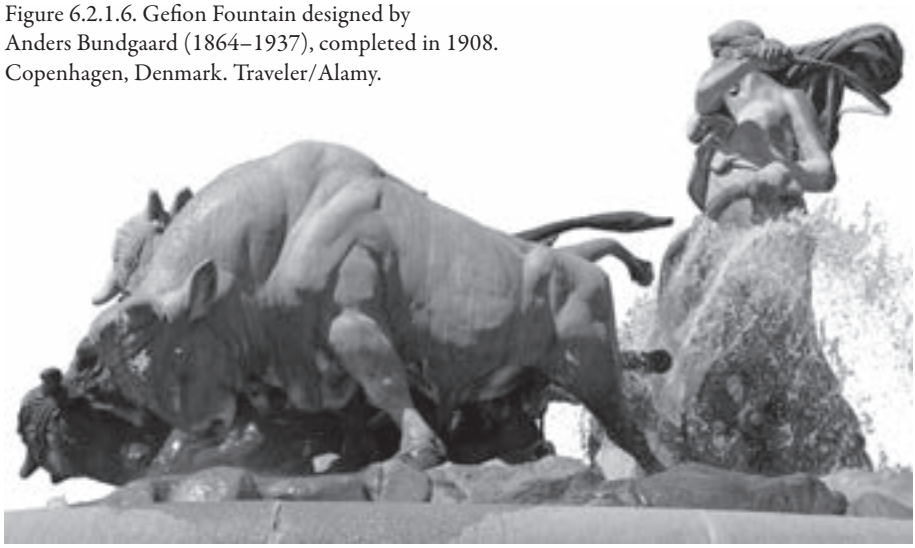

Figure 6.2.1.6. Gefion Fountain designed by Anders Bundgaard (1864–1937), completed in 1908. Copenhagen, Denmark. Traveler/Alamy.

and the saga period. One example is Carl Johan Bonnesen's highly dramatic, violently expressive 'Thor's Battle against the Jotunns' from 1897 to 1898 (Figure 6.2.1.5). It was originally a sketch for a competition but was bought by Carl Jacobsen, cast in bronze and put up on the roof of the Carlsberg breweries in Copenhagen. Standing in his chariot, brandishing Mjöllnir, the bearded Thor — half-naked but wearing his strength-belt — storms forward after his wild goats, while the equally bearded and half-naked giants crawl around his feet or lie flattened under the goats. In the catalogue of Danish sculpture from around 1900 in the Glyptotek in Copenhagen, published by the museum in 1955, the wild rampaging is described with a touch of irony as a 'Romantic pendant' to Bissen's classical Quadriga on the roof of the Thorvaldsen Museum (Bencard and Friborg 1995: 12).

The large Gefion-fountain (Figure 6.2.1.6) by Anders Bundgaard (1908) in Langelinie at the end of Amaliegade in Copenhagen connects the viewer directly with Norse mythology. According to Snorri Sturluson and the poet Bragi the Old, Gylfi, king of Sweden, had promised the Æsir woman Gefion a piece of land as large as she could plough with her oxen in a day and a night. Her four oxen from Jotunheim, who were her own sons by a giant, ploughed so deeply that a large chunk of land loosened. The oxen dragged it out to the west and fastened it there; that became Sjælland. Bundgaard, also influenced by Symbolism and French sculpture, chose to represent the four sons as four oxen, who, with unbending force, pull the triumphant mother's plough. The sea

is symbolized by the water of the fountain, spouting like a waterfall. He is supposed to have used a sketch by Frølich as a model (Wivel 1994: 211).

Kai Nielsen's sculpture 'The Well of Ymir' from 1912 (Figure 6.2.1.7) in the square of Faaborg on Fyn is something of a finale to the efforts of Danish artists to do justice to Norse mythology. At the same time the artist seems to stretch out his hand 135 years back in time to Nicolai Abildgaard's little sketch depicting Ymir feeding on milk from the cow Audhumbla. The subject for the well — difficult to handle, to say the least — is the same, derived from Snorri's *Edda*'s creation vision. And strangely enough, the work by Nielsen radiates the same imagery and originality as Abildgaard's, a temperament which came to be lacking in most who felt their way through the Nordic mythology genre (Bramsen 1975: 34). In the Faaborg well Nielsen has made the cow and the god form an upward-moving spiral, with an expressive pattern of movement as a result. Ymir's body is somewhat twisted, while the muscular Audhumbla is impressively drawn with her back bent with the weight of the four big, tense teats. The cow is modelled with a force and a freedom Henrik Bramsen finds unusual in Danish sculpture but which he believes to be a result of the sketchy

Figure 6.2.1.7.
Kai Nielsen, *Ymerbrønden* ('The Well of Ymir').
Photo courtesy of the Faaborg museum.

modelling that preceded the piece. It was hewn in sandstone and placed in the town square in 1913 and later, in 1964, replaced by a copy cast in bronze. The sandstone original is now in the Faaborg museum.

During the rest of the twentieth century, artists turned to other subjects, which does not mean that the Nordic past vanished into oblivion. It was above all in literature that it came to be of a certain importance. The foremost example is Johannes V. Jensen, who in the first parts of his large prose work *Den lange Rejse* ('The Long Journey'), in which he tries to depict the development of mankind in a Darwinian spirit, engaged with the subject of life in the Scandinavia of the past. In *Norne-Gest* from 1919 he depicted the rich Bronze-Age culture of the North. Around 1930 he began to take an interest in the Icelandic sagas and was co-editor of a publication of these in three volumes with several of his own translations. Later, in 1955, Thorkild Bjørnvig published *Anubis*, a collection of poetry in which the large Norse poem-cycle *Sejdmændene paa Skratteskjær* ('The Sorcerers on Skratte Skerry') is included (on this subject, see also Chapter 6.2.3 below).

This interest in Old Norse literature also influenced book illustration. In this connection Jöran Mjöberg (1967–68: II, 28, 344, 416–23) has distinguished three outstanding Danish book illustrators: Eiler Krag (1908–91), Mogens Zieler (1905–83) and Sigurd Vasegaard (1909–67). Krag illustrated *Njáls saga* in an edition by Ellen Olsen in 1948. He worked efficiently and sparsely in ink, with light suggestions rather than fully drawn figures. The black ink is dramatically outlined against the white paper, which in many places has been left untouched. There are no background milieus, only figures, which, with the help of movements and body language, create an intensive life and psychological characterization. It is a totally modern way of working, with no connections to the detailed narrative form of the nineteenth century. Similarly Zieler does not refer to older representations of the saga period. He approaches his subject without respect, humorously, spiritually and playfully — the figures are often a kind of drooling — something which does not exclude seriousness and often macabre elements. In the same way as Krag, Zieler made use of the possibilities of black ink but, contrary to Krag, allowed the purity of the simple line to play a larger role. His drawings illustrate *Guder, Helte and Godtfolk*, a popular edition from 1954 of Martin Larsen's *Edda* translations from the 1940s.

Someone who showed a closer kinship with an earlier tradition — especially as it developed in the large illustrated Norwegian edition of Snorri Sturluson's *Kongesagaer* from 1899 (see Chapter 6.2.3 below) — was the graphic artist Sigurd Vasegaard, whose illustrations, often in the strong, stylized manner of a woodcut — are characterized by weight, seriousness and suggestive visions of a hoary

past. The simple, expressive form with strong contours is well suited to strong sentiments. The prolific Vasegaard illustrated Saxo as well as the second edition (1955) of Vilhelm Grønbech's book *Vor Folkeæt i Oldtiden*. A magnificent piece of work is Vasegaard's atlas folio *Völvens Spaadom* from 1957, in a translation by Thöger Larsen. He also created the illustrations for Bjørnvig's above-mentioned poem *Sejdmændene paa Skratteskjaer*.

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6.2.2 – Painting and Sculpture in Sweden

Bo Grandien†
Translated from the Swedish by Inga-Lena Angström Grandien

In Sweden, Gothicism, a movement which in various ways sought to relate itself to the Nordic past, reached its peak in the seventeenth century (see Chapter 3.1 above). The background to the rise of Gothicism was Sweden's somewhat belated appearance as a great power in Europe. It was important for the new great power to legitimize both its position and its martial character. Thus it was necessary to construct a past for it that would be as distinguished as possible. Or, as the historian and poet Erik Gustaf Geijer expressed the matter in 1825: *Odödliga bedrifter, som skulle göra samtidens beundran, syntes fordra en ej mindre lysande forntid* ('Immortal feats, intended to raise the admiration of contemporaries, seemed to crave a no less brilliant past').[1] A suitable way to elevate Sweden in the eyes of others was to assert that there was once a close connection between the Nordic countries and classical antiquity. These ideas reached their climax in the work of Olof Rudbeck, who identified the Scandinavian peninsula not only with the land of the Hyperboreans but also with Plato's sunken Atlantis. Sweden was thus transformed into the source of all human cultivation, of song and poetry, of astronomy and medicine. The art of writing — the runes — had also been invented there. From this Atlantis — Old

[1] Erik Gustaf Geijer, *Svea rikes hävder* (Landqvist 1923–31: IV, 1–354 at 84).

Bo Grandien (1932–2014) was a writer, poet, and Professor of the History of Art at Stockholm University. His work focused on how the past is represented in the visual arts of the nineteenth century: *Drömmen om medeltiden*, 1974; *Drömmen om renässansen*, 1978; *Vindruvans glöd — nygöticistiskt i tanke konst och miljö under 1800-talet*, 1987.

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume I: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 469–502
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115271

Uppsala — the gods both of antiquity and the Orient emigrated. The gods of Norse mythology and the classical world could thus be woven together.

Together with the first volume of his *Atland* (1679) Rudbeck published a volume of illustrations, the so-called Atlas volume, with pictures in copper plate and woodcuts based on sketches by two students, Samuel Otto and Petrus Törnevall, who followed Rudbeck's instructions. The latter also made drawings for Antikvitetskollegiet, a learned institution established in 1667, whose task it was to collect, study and publish older historical material, from documents to archaeological findings. Often the learned books were illustrated with copper plates made on the basis of sketches by anonymous draughtsmen or the writers themselves; the aim was to make the images as objective as possible. Some painters working in seventeenth-century Sweden occasionally took their subjects from Nordic prehistory and mythology, but no special art movement arose at this time based on this subject, in spite of the great patriotic interest in it.

The grandiose fantasies of Nordic history died out at the beginning of the eighteenth century concurrently with the end of Sweden's period as a great power. The attitude to the past changed its character. Exaggerated patriotism did not fit into the more sober world of the Enlightenment, in which history writing laid greater stress upon victories of the human reason, virtue, and morality and the progress of culture from darkness to clarity. During the second half of the century, the ideas of pre-Romanticism also reached Sweden, where both Montesquieu's and Paul Henri Mallet's works were read (see Chapters 4.1–4.5 above). A new ideal image of the earliest inhabitants in the North started to emerge, no longer as world conquerors but as a simple and genuine race, brave and hard-working, hardened by a harsh climate. Sometimes moral qualities were underlined, sometimes physical — and always in contrast to the emasculated and depraved people of the present day. Especially favoured was the image of the free and independent Nordic farmer, who had one hand on the plough and one on the sword, ready to defend his land.

Writers took up this material, and interest in Old Norse subjects grew once more. Icelandic texts were translated, and there were speculations around Snorri Sturluson's stories of the Æsir's exodus from Asia and of their coming to Sweden under the command of Odin. In his historical and national propaganda, King Gustav III associated both with these movements and with the incipient idealization of Gustav Vasa, presenting himself as a distant relative of both Odin and the last mentioned. His opera *Gustaf Wasa*, written in collaboration with Johan Henrik Kjellgren, was performed in 1786 and followed in 1787 by the opera *Frigga*, versified by Carl Gustaf Leopold (on these operas, see Chapter 6.1.1).

The stage design was created by the Frenchman Louis Jean Desprez, who had been recalled from Italy by the king for the purpose of giving the scenery a higher artistic dignity than he thought native artists would be capable of. *Gustaf Wasa*, with its brilliant vision of Stockholm in the sixteenth century, was a big success. In the scenery for *Frigga*, Desprez mixed Old Norse and classical antiquity by representing Frigga's temple in Old Uppsala in the shape of a cave with a Doric gateway, guarded by sphinxes (see Chapter 6.1, fig. 6.1.1.2; Cederlöf 1992: 83). The performance was seen as truly 'Gothic'. One of the king's inspirations for *Frigga* is likely to have come from seeing some wash-drawings from a suite that Elias Martin had made at the beginning of the 1780s, intended as illustrations in a never-published book on Swedish history, building on works by the historians Sven Lagerbring and Olof Celsius the Younger (Grate 1998).

In the first volume, Martin paid attention to the story of Odin's arrival in Sweden, while in the second he seems to have been especially interested in heathen rituals with human sacrifices. Apart from the subjects, there is, however, nothing especially Norse in the drawings. That is also the case with the four hundred drawings Carl August Ehrensvärd, admiral, art philosopher, writer and draughtsman, had made in his castle in Skåne in 1795–96. The series was called *Snillets lek i svenska historien* ('The Play of Genius in Swedish History'), a title that shows the humorous, disrespectful tone that characterizes the work. The series deals with Sweden's history and starts with Odin's visit to King Gylfe (Grate 1998: 220–22).

The artist Pehr Hörberg also amused himself, from the end of the 1780s onwards, by making drawings on subjects from Norse history, clearly influenced by people who had been attracted to the 'Gothic' infatuation in the circles around Gustav III. He drew both single figures and whole series from Icelandic sagas, which he had got to know from Danish translations, among other sources. At the beginning of the nineteenth century he made drawings with motifs from the story of the hero Sigurd and others of that kind like 'Rolf Krake's Last Battle'. In these drawings he mixed Old Norse themes with elements from popular tradition.

Hörberg grew up on a small farm in Småland in rather poor circumstances. When he wanted to create an illusion of how people lived in the past, he preferred to draw archaic looking farming scenes from his own memory. One example is a wash-drawing showing his vision of a Norse 'Christmas', that is, heathen, Yule (Figure 6.2.2.1). We see the interior of a big hall filled with peasants who have gathered to feast and play. Some dance together in a long dance, a child is standing on its head, others 'pull rolling-pin' (a kind of tug-of-war), stir the

kettles or sit at the table eating ham and drinking mead — from horns — with sweeping movements. The people are actually Norse gods with their weapons hanging just inside the door; on the back wall there is an image of Thor on his throne in whose honour the feast is held. Beneath the wash-drawing Hörberg has written: *Thors högtid, som firades vid vintersolståndet och kallades Jul; som än i Sverige så kallas och med mycken likhet firas* ('Thor's feast, that was celebrated at the winter solstice and called Yule; which is still so called in Sweden and celebrated in much the same manner') (Lindqvist and Ullén 1998: 83, 85, 136; Grandien 1987: 36–37).

Early in the nineteenth century there occurred in Sweden a national catastrophe which, among other things, resulted in the renewal of interest in Norse subjects. In 1808 a Russian contingent marched into Finland, which had been Swedish since medieval times. The Swedish army was forced to leave the country, and at the Peace of Fredrikshamn in 1809 Sweden ceded Åland and Finland to Russia. This meant that a third of the Swedish area and a quarter of its population was lost. The internal political situation was at times chaotic. King Gustav III had been murdered in 1792, and, during the unstable year of 1807, his son and follower on the throne Gustav IV Adolf was dethroned; instead, his uncle Carl was proclaimed king under the name of Carl XIII. A new constitution that ended the Gustavian autocracy was adopted. The new king was, however, old, fragile and childless, so a Danish prince, Carl August, was called in as Pretender in 1809. He died suddenly in 1810, and in the same year, after the dramatic events that followed, the French field marshal Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte was elected Pretender to the Swedish throne. He was adopted by Carl XIII and immediately became the country's regent as Crown Prince Carl Johan. After the death of Carl XIII in 1818 he ascended the throne under the name of Carl XIV Johan.

The loss of Finland led to demands for a moral and national upheaval to avoid new humiliations. In Stockholm a number of young academicians, public officials and officers possessed by this thought formed an association called *Göthiska förbundet* ('Gothic Society'). The rules were, to be sure, half facetious at the beginning, each member taking the name of a Norse saga hero. But the aim was serious: to give Sweden back its self-assurance and to awaken the country from the paralysis which had almost led to the loss of independence. The decline had started during the time when grand national memories had fallen into oblivion. But it was not the Middle Ages that needed to be awoken; instead, once more it was the pre-Christian Nordic past. That is why the league referred back to the shaping of the 'gothic' ideals in the seventeenth century, and once again the old warriors were called forth out of Scandinavia's misty past.

Figure 6.2.2.1. Pehr Hörberg, *Smålandsk jul* ('Yule in Småland'). 1785. N1_02863. Photo: Nordiska Museet, Stockholm.

Figure 6.2.2.2. Pehr Hörberg, *Oden bygger sin Hufvud-stad Sigtuna* ('Odin founds his capital, Sigtuna'). N1_07705. Photo: Nordiska Museet, Stockholm.

Poets such as Esaias Tegnér and Erik Gustaf Geijer belonged to the society and gave impetus to the movement (see Chapter 5.3 above). In the society's journal, several of their magnificent poems inspired by Old Norse culture were published, *Odalmannen* and *Vikingen*, among others, by Geijer, and a high-flown, patriotic work, *Svea*, by Tegnér and eventually also parts of his *Frithofs saga*, the poem-cycle that would become extremely popular during the nineteenth century, both at home and abroad, especially in Germany. But Tegnér was not totally convinced of the usefulness of Norse mythology in modern poetry, doubting the possibility of making a two-thousand-year-old religion fit in with present times. Neither was Geijer of the opinion that the Nordic past was something that should literally be wished back. The aim of the activities of the Gothic Society was not to rouse the dead but to instil hope in the living and, with the help of recollections and traditions, rebuild the character of the people once more. Furthermore, Geijer thought — under the influence of Romantic philosophy — that the Norse heroic saga was essentially tragic, carrying its own downfall within itself. Despite these reservations, the literary programme was very successful. Nordic mythology came to interest poets like Atterbom and Ling more and more.

Although these subjects showed themselves capable of stimulating both literature and historical research, the circumstances for the visual arts were more complicated. In this field the Gothic Society also argued for a national art inspired by the Nordic past and its mythology, but the difficulties once more lay in the question of what this past world looked like.

Pehr Hörberg continued to take an interest in the subject and is said to have read the poems of Geijer with tear-filled eyes. In 1812 he received a commission from Crown Prince Carl Johan for a painting that was to depict the arrival of the Æsir in the North, led by Odin — also called Sigge Fridulfsson — and his meeting with Svithiod's (Sweden's) King Gylfe. Hörberg made a series of twelve wash drawings on these and other similar subjects, which he collected in a booklet entitled *Odins sång* ('Odin's Song'); he never had time to finish the actual painting. The booklet shows how Odin in his fight with the giants unites his armed Æsir with the native armies. Another, often reproduced image is the founding of Sigtuna by Odin, *Oden bygger sin Hufvud-stad Sigtuna* ('Odin founds his capital, Sigtuna') (Figure 6.2.2.2). A number of warriors in the closest equivalent to Roman clothes have gathered on a small hill and are studying an architectural plan, which is hewn into a boulder together with some explanatory runes. In the background there is the newly built town of Sigtuna with tall stone houses turning their stepped gables towards a harbour full of ships. The only 'Old Norse' element in this drawing, as well as in the others, is the runestone (Lindqvist and Ullén 1998: 137; Grandien 1987: 55). Odin himself has been given the features of Carl Johan.

The most interesting thing about the never-finished painting was the commission itself. The underlying aim was political: 1812 was the year in which Carl Johan changed his foreign policy. It now aimed at Sweden renouncing its claims on Finland and, with the help of Russia, taking over Norway instead, which had belonged to Denmark for many centuries. This total turn-around, also implying that the old arch-enemy Russia was turned into an ally, was a bitter disappointment for the many who had seen Carl Johan as a guarantee of the recovery of Finland. To the patriots, the change of course came as a real shock. It also became a strain on Carl Johan, who probably felt himself hard pressed and therefore had to consolidate his newly won legitimacy to the throne by any possible means. The association with the myth of Odin's migration suited the heir to the throne perfectly. He could see himself as the saving Odin, while King Gylfe symbolized Carl XIII, the adoptive father. For the same reasons, he supported the 'Gothic' programme from the start.

A longing for new subjects had started to grow among up-and-coming artists, who were dissatisfied with the stiffness and conservatism of the Academy. Its president, Niclas Edelcrantz, a competent man of many occupations, did not do very much for the Academy apart from demanding total adherence to the ideals of classical antiquity. Just as conservative and steadfastly negative to all new-fangled ideas was his predecessor from 1813, Fredrik Emanuel Silverstolpe. The professors, who were all considered weak and too old, on the whole followed the same line. The only exception was Carl Fredrik von Breda who had spent a lot of time in England and there come under the influence of modern movements. Every Saturday he held a reception in his home, to which, among others, members of the Gothic Society and some of the more ambitious students at the Academy came, for example, Bengt Erland Fogelberg and Johan Gustav von Breda with his son John. They founded the Society for Art Studies, which invited Pehr Henrik Ling, among others. Ling had seen how Danish artists had utilized subjects from Norse history and mythology, something he wished would also happen in Sweden. In 1814 he lectured in the Society with much force and conviction on the use of Scandinavian myths in the visual arts. The lectures were repeated in 1815, 1816 and 1817 and were collected in his book *Eddornas Sinnebildslära* ('The Symbolism of the Eddas'), intended to give the artist a large stock of detailed descriptions of myths and stories, suitable for images (see further Chapter 5.3 above).

Silverstolpe strongly opposed such tendencies. In a speech at the Academy's feast-day in 1815 he praised the sense of beauty with which the old Greeks had represented their gods and heroes. This was still the only example and 'surpassed immensely the raw and monstrous results of the imagination of the Nordic people' (Lindwall 1986: 33). Nevertheless, the campaign for the Nordic myths as a source of inspiration gained support. In 1817 an anonymous donor gave fifty ducats to the Gothic Society. The money was intended be used as a reward for those Swedish or Norwegian artists who wanted to work with motifs from Nordic mythology. It is possible that the anonymous donor acted on behalf of Crown Prince Carl Johan. The society agreed to the terms. A competition was announced and a jury was appointed.

For the coming competition, Geijer lit a torch with his article *Betraktelser i afseende på de nordiska myternas användande i skön konst* ('Observations on the Use of the Nordic Myths in the Fine Arts'), presented to the Society at two meetings in 1817 and published in 1818 in *Iduna*. Here Geijer once more expressed his doubts on the meaningfulness of wishing a return of Old Norse history. The paper is an answer to the theoretical debate which, after having begun in Germany, was being held in Denmark at this time and which culminated in the battle of 1820–21 (see Chapters 6.2.1 and 6.2.4).

Among other things, Geijer brings up the basic difficulty in freeing classical antiquity from the Norse, that is, dressing up classicism in an Old Norse costume. If Mars and Venus were named Thor and Freya, they would still continue to be the same old antique gods, Geijer points out, and Hercules would not become Thor just because his club is exchanged for a hammer or the lion's skin for a bear's. One could not, he stated, distance the old myths from the historical context to which they belonged. If you took mythical conceptions from a certain time period with the purpose of reshaping them, it would be necessary also to bring along their 'framing', or, in his words: 'för varje Gud följer ett människosläkte med' ('with each god comes a whole people') (Landqvist 1923). The myths must thus be represented in such a way that they appeared as indivisible from their subject as the skin is from the body. Only then living form could be created. But this had really only been possible at a time when the myths were still vivid in peoples' minds, and, accordingly, a later period's attempts to recreate them from the ground up were always doomed to fail.

Geijer had another, maybe more subtle argument for his opinion that Norse mythology was badly suited to be represented in the visual arts: it was more symbolical in its nature than reachable in a tactile way. It turned itself more to the thought than to the mind, and was through this abstract trait more suitable for poetry. Geijer returned also to his idea, inspired by contemporary speculative mythologists such as Grundtvig and Schelling, that the Nordic imagination was by nature not creative but destructive. What the myth tells us, according to Geijer, is that the Norse world of gods is destroyed, which means it is dissolved into poetry and depth of thought rather than into a world that lets itself be visualized. Furthermore, he considered the Norse gods were too diffusely rendered in literature to be given flesh and blood in an artistic representation. But, he said — maybe inspired by Jens P. Møller, who had expressed similar opinions in 1812 — when actual details happened to exist, they could drive the artist to despair: for example, the one-eyed Odin or the eight legs of Sleipnir. The eight legs were, to be sure, a splendid literal symbol for speed, but would be difficult to attempt to visualize in a work of art.

The least suitable art form for visualizing subjects from Norse mythology was sculpture, according to Geijer, the reason being that, in spite of his Romantic orientation, he was so deeply rooted in ways of thinking within Classicism that he regarded sculpture as a universal type of art, which had as its purpose to render the human body in an idealistic way. Therefore it could not be endowed with national characteristics. This universal art had reached its peak in Greek sculpture, which had expressed the beauty of the human body so completely

that all accidental circumstances of time, place and individual opinion fell away of their own accord. Greek sculpture therefore remained exemplary. It was different with painting, which did not look at first hand for the universal and the eternal beauty of forms; instead it looked for what was telling and characteristic. This made the rendering of both the individual and the national possible. In painting action could also be represented, at the same time as colour gave life and feeling. But action humanizes, and if the gods are shown in action, they are no longer gods but heroes.

With that, in spite of all his sceptical objections, Geijer had arrived at the firm advice he wanted to give to artists who were interested in Norse subjects: they should differentiate between purely mythological and heroic stories. The poet and the artist must start in the midst of human life and from there try to rise to the land of the gods, not the other way round. Anyone who wanted to understand the inner meaning of the myths had to begin by making himself at home in the world of the sagas, forcing himself right to their marrow. That was the only viable way to go: to leave the gods in peace and instead with the help of the senses and one's imagination try to recreate the world in which the heroes had wandered. Only then real Nordic art would become possible. As inspiring subject matter for artists Geijer suggested especially the Volsung and Nibelung legends, as being full of distinctive characters, human actions and fate, adventures and heroic life, all drawn with clear, sharp outlines. Above this rich ground arched the sky of the Old Norse myths.

In the same year, 1818, the competition was settled, and the successful works were exhibited in Stockholm. First prize went to the painter and engraver Isac Salmson, who had made a relief of Thor fighting the giants from his carriage. The painter Pehr Berggren received second prize for a drawing showing Freyr handing over his sword to Skírnir. The sculptor Bengt Erland Fogelberg exhibited plaster models for three planned large sculptures: 'Odin on his Throne', 'Thor Fighting the Midgard Serpent' and 'Freyr'. One interesting and forward-looking piece of art had taken part without competing: Gustaf Sandberg's coloured sketch for an oil-painting, *Valkyrior rida till striden* ('Valkyries Riding into Battle'), representing the three Valkyries Gudur, Rota and Skulda riding off to battle in the company of Freya. High above hazy masses of clouds the three first-mentioned, oversized women come riding at a gallop from the right with flying mantles, raised lances and shining helmets, fragmentarily lit by sunbeams that penetrate the darkness. They meet Freya, who comes in from the left on a white horse. On the dark earth far below this advancing, mythological quartet a swarming army can be seen indistinctly: these are the men the virgins of death will bring up to Valhalla after the battle. Sandberg had been inspired by some rousing lines in

Figure 6.2.2.3, Johan Gustaf Sandberg, *Valkyrior rida till striden* ('Valkyries Riding into Battle'). 1818. NM6866. Photo: Erik Cornelius/Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Figure 6.2.2.4.
Bengt Fogelberg, drinking horn presented to Erik Gustaf Geijer by the Värmland Nation. 1816. Photograph reproduced by permission of the Gustavianum, Uppsala University.

Tegnér's *Svea*: *Det dånar i jorden,* | *det flammar i skyn.* | *Valkyrior rida* | *på frustande hästar* ('There is a roar on the earth, | there are flames in the sky. | Valkyries ride | on snorting horses') (cf. Christensson 1999: 24–25). Sandberg later executed the motif in oil (Figure 6.2.2.3), and the finished work was acquired by Count Gustaf Trolle-Bonde and taken to Säfstaholm. But apart from some drawings for Tegnér's *Frithiofs saga*, among other things, Sandberg did not devote any more time to Old Norse subjects. Instead, he concentrated on depicting the life and manners of the common people and on subjects from Swedish history.

In the exhibition of 1818 Fogelberg showed a drinking horn with Nordic motifs (Figure 6.2.2.4), which had been made on the basis of his drawings by the silversmith Johan Petter Grönvall in Stockholm and decorated with images of chased silver taken from the Nordic myths. In the middle of the horn stands Yggdrasil, the world ash tree, with the dragon Nidhögg at its roots. On one side of the tree, Sigurd and Brynhildr are sitting; on the other side, Brage, the god of poetry, is playing the harp, together with the goddess Idun with the apples of immortality. The horn, which stands on birds' feet, had been presented to Geijer in 1816 as a gift from the students from the region of Värmland (Lönnroth 1992: 105–06).

The exhibition was a great success. Sandberg's sketch aroused admiration, and Tegnér called the artist 'the Valkyrie-painter'. But the exhibition also gave rise to criticism and banter. The Academy of Art, dominated by coolly controlled Classicism and led by Silverstolpe, arranged a counter-exhibition. In this camp the Norse subject matter was still regarded as barbarous. A writer in one of the newspapers was of the opinion that the Gothic Society wanted the Swedish people to go back to using shoes made of birch bark, live in huts and, drunk from beer made of bog myrtle, throw gnawed bones at one another. The Society answered these attacks with three more large exhibitions, in 1819, 1821 and 1822. It soon showed that the oppositions between the two camps were beginning to even out. Proof of this was that Sandberg was elected to the Academy in 1821. The support of the new king Carl XIV Johan for the Old Norse movement was of decisive importance. In the exhibition of 1818 he commissioned a drinking horn of the same kind as Geijer's. This was also executed by Grönvall on the basis of Fogelberg's drawings, and the subject was one favoured by the king: Odin comes to Sweden and enters into an alliance with Gylfe. In 1835 he donated the drinking horn to the students' union in Uppsala, which the year before had received him beside the grave mounds of Old Uppsala, where mead-drinking out of horns was part of the ceremony.

Even more important was the fact that the king at the same time commissioned from Fogelberg three images of Norse gods in marble. These would come to be some of the most important works in the Old Norse art movement, in the same way as, over time, Fogelberg would become one of Sweden's most prominent sculptors of monumental works, though he lived in Rome from 1821 until his death in 1854. However, it took a long time for the images to be finished. The final contract for the first, Odin, was written only in 1828. By then the king had persuaded Fogelberg to give Odin a more martial look than he had originally intended. According to the original idea, he was to be represented on his throne Hlidskjalf. The king, however, wanted him standing up, like a war-god looking from some mountain top into old Scandinavia, thus transformed into a symbol of battle instead of a symbol of light and thought. Much later, in 1839, Fogelberg started working on the other two gods. He seems to have hesitated in the face of the task, but the king urged him on. The king also saw to it that Freyr with his wild boar was replaced by Balder, an exchange that mirrored a changed attitude to Norse mythology. Concurrently with the ecclesiastical renaissance in Sweden in this period, it became important to interpret Balder as a god of atonement, almost as a Christ-figure. So Fogelberg used Thorvaldsen's Christ as model. Balder stands with his chest bare to the waist and with his arms open in a welcoming gesture, as if wanting to show that he is ready to receive the gods' shower

of missiles without fear. Fogelberg rendered Thor, who in the sketch had fought with the Midgard Serpent, as walking with his hammer, or rather an axe, the goat skin on his shoulder, ready for a fight with knuckle irons on his hands. More than Odin, this heavily built fighter gives an impression of Nordic fierceness.

Balder and Thor were also a great success when they were shown for the first time in the Royal Museum in 1844. Yet, despite the realism of the Thor figure, they remained classical gods in Nordic dress, just as Geijer had prophesied. Fogelberg had not been able to represent Odin, the Nordic Zeus, as one-eyed, because that had been against the principles of High Art, and Thor's goat's skin was, as Geijer had anticipated, an immediate translation of Hercules's lion skin. The three colossal statues were later moved to the rooms of the History Museum in the National Museum, which had opened in 1866. They are today in the Orangery Museum in the Ulriksdal Palace outside Stockholm (Grandien 1987: 58–60).

Another artist whom Carl XIV Johan favoured was Pehr Berggren, and for his pavilion, Rosendal, built in 1823–27, the king bought Berggren's painting of Heimdall that had won first prize at the second exhibition arranged by the Gothic Society in 1821. For the Red Salon in the same pavilion he had Hjalmar Mörner paint a frieze in grisaille with the king's favourite theme of Odin's or the Æsir's coming to Sweden to save the country from the oppression of the giants. The frieze was put up in 1829, and so that no one would miss its allegorical message, a portrait of Carl XIV Johan was hung on the wall beneath the central scene with the meeting of Odin and Gylfe.

One enthusiastic follower of the Old Norse movement was the painter Carl Wahlbom, who had originally intended to devote himself to the military profession. He was very interested in bodily exercise and anatomy. Through Ling he became interested in the Nordic myths and sagas and made drawings of Loki, Sigyn and the battle of Fyrisvall. His largest project in the genre was the illustrations for Ling's *Asarne* ('The Æsir') with thirty large etchings, one for each song in the nine-hundred-page book. He managed to finish eighteen, and they were published in two booklets in 1833–36.

In the 1830s the heavy patriotic rhetoric of the Gothic Society was beginning to recede. After the loss of Finland in 1809, Norway's union with Sweden in 1814 and the change of ruler, Sweden returned to the reality of everyday life. The country's economy was heavily strained, and its practical problems needed to be solved. Farming and industry craved reforms. In literature this new climate corresponded to the beginning of the striving for realism. In the same spirit the Gothic Society was attacked by liberal critics. The members lost interest, and in 1833 the Society cancelled all activities, although it was not

formally dissolved until 1844. Interest in the life and customs of the common people was growing, with attention directed towards the still vivid countryside. Yet something of the heritage from the Gothic Society remained in the idea that the life of contemporary farmers was a direct continuation of how life was once lived in old Scandinavia. Through studying the present time a road to the past could also be found. This coincides with corresponding ideas in Denmark. Jens P. Møller had expressed the thought at the beginning of the 1820s that a connection to national Danish themes would make it easier to understand the Old Norse subject matter, and in his famous speech in the newly established Scandinavian Society in Copenhagen in 1844, Høyen pointed out to the artists that those who did not go out and become acquainted with Nordic nature and Nordic folk life would never be able to present an image of the Nordic past to their contemporaries.

By this time, however, new elements had appeared in Denmark which would once more emphasize the Nordic past and its mythology: the national liberal movement. This needed an attractive symbol for its fight against the threats from the south, and for its demands for increased popular self-government. Scandinavian co-operation was seen as a means to achieve these two goals, and in that way the foundation was laid in Denmark for the Scandinavianist movement, which would quickly spread from the 1840s in the Nordic countries. It was not easy, though, to find ties to unite the individual countries. Sweden and Denmark had for centuries been at war with one another, the last time in 1814, and Norway had been forced into a union with Sweden. The solution was again the creation of a strategic historical myth according to which the North had formed a unity in the past. The same Gothic tribe had ruled in the three countries, the same gods had been worshipped and the same language had been spoken in the valleys of Norway as well as in the lowlands of Denmark. That unity would once more prevail, and that is why, just as interest had started to cool down, the Nordic past was paradoxically taken again as a model for the battles of the day.

Once again it was students and younger academics who were taken by the movement, but interest was much more broadly based than at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Large student meetings with participants from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and occasionally Finland were arranged in the various university towns. With good reason those in power were worried by the movement and at the beginning tried to hinder the meetings but soon realized that it was better to grin and bear it. The student meetings continued during the 1850s and culminated in the most magnificent one in Copenhagen in 1862. After Denmark's defeat in 1864 in the war against Germany, when the

country felt betrayed by its Nordic neighbours, the fervour was damped down and in 1872 the last meeting was held in Uppsala. 1864 was also the terminal point for the Scandinavianist movement. The struggle for civil reforms continued however, and the 1860s especially became a period of expectation and belief in the future.

For the visual arts all this was of considerable importance. By now Norse themes had a permanent position in the Academy of Art and appeared sometimes as subjects for prize competitions. But the approach to them was conventional. The Academy prescribed or encouraged high mythological subjects, which were expected to be treated in the same way as in traditional history painting, resulting in works that differed very little from the usual imitation of representations from classical antiquity, often in a Roman milieu, where only a few details, for example some dragon arabesques on a column, hint at the Old Norse. However, some enthusiasts like Nils Jakob Blommér, Johan Peter Molin, Carl Gustaf Qvarnström and August Malmström tried to depart from the convention and to capture the new sentiments.

After having finished his studies at the Academy, Blommér had become a member of a Scandinavianist-sympathizing association, Konstnärsgillet ('Artists' Guild'), founded in 1846 in Stockholm among a circle of artists, musicians, painters and architects. Here, in the footsteps of the Gothic Society, new attempts were made to direct the interest of artists towards Norse subjects. But now it was not only a question of Old Norse gods and heroes. The national interest had, as already mentioned, begun to be stressed more and more. Among the members were many ethnologists, including Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, who worked in the spirit of Jacob Grimm, which is why other inspiring traits from the past were also emphasized: the world of folk-tales and folk-songs, and nature mythology including conceptions of the *Näck*, the Nicker, an evil spirit of the water, and the elves.

Blommér and his friend, the sculptor Johan Peter Molin, were influenced by all this, and Blommér started to choose his subjects from the world of folk-tales. On a study trip to Germany in 1847 he got to know the flourishing German school of painting that emanated from a folklorist and nationalist movement with roots in the work of the brothers Grimm. The artists painted elves, sea-maidens and other water and forest creatures. In Dresden Blommér admired one of the cartoons for Schnorr von Caroldsfeld's suite with motifs from the *Nibelungenlied*, intended for the Residence in Munich. He continued to Paris and in 1849 painted *Älvdrömmen* ('The Elves' Dream') there, and in 1850 the famous *Älvdansen* ('The Dance of the Elves') (Figure 6.2.2.5) and *Näcken och Ägirs döttrar* ('The Nicker and the Daughters of Ægir'). The

Figure 6.2.2.5. Nils Jakob Blommér, *Älvdansen* ('The Dance of the Elves'). 1850. NM2162. Photo: National Museum, Stockholm.

Figure 6.2.2.6. Nils Jakob Blommér, *Freja bland molnen sökande sin försvunne make* ('Freja among the Clouds Seeking her Vanished Mate'). 1852. NM1198. Photo: National Museum, Stockholm.

first of these shows a shepherd asleep under a clump of trees while a group of elves dances on a grave mound next to him, their soft contours fading away in the foliage. In 'The Dance of the Elves', the elves dance in a ring at dawn, against a background of the edge of a wood, from where a dead tree stretches its bare branches towards the sky. The painting is clearly influenced by Moritz von Schwind's *Elves' Dance* but has nothing of the latter's dryness in form and colour. Instead it is characterized by its soft forms and a more open lyric nature, which seems to build on memories of observations Blommér had made of Swedish nature. A careful look at the painting reveals that the Castle of Gripsholm can actually be glimpsed behind the edge of the wood, perhaps as a reminder of the national theme.

This fits perfectly with what Blommér wrote in a letter to the Academy: anyone who wanted to represent folk-tales and myths in images had to be able to represent the landscape, since it constitutes the temperament of the people in the North. The aim was that the piece of art should illustrate the connection between nature and man. Even more clearly the figures and nature melt together in 'The Nicker and the Daughters of Ægir'. In the background there is a castle ruin that has been interpreted as a mortality symbol but may rather be, as with the Castle of Gripsholm in the 'Dance of the Elves', a marking of the national theme. The ruin is actually the Castle of Stegeborg, a well-known landmark at the approach to the Göta Canal, the waterway right through Sweden from the Baltic to the North Sea.

With paintings of this kind Blommér had created something completely new, but unfortunately he did not continue along that path on account of the criticism he received from the Academy in Stockholm, which was about to decide whether to give him a prolonged travel stipend. Some of the judges were certainly very pleased while others were deeply concerned. How could a young artist choose a motif from a folk-tale and throw away his time on 'such a low subject', they asked themselves? Instead, he ought to continue to Rome and study antiquity. The result was that before his departure from Paris in 1850, Blommér decided to follow the Academy's directions. Once in Rome he immediately started to study and copy the art of the Renaissance and the Baroque, and when he returned to working on motifs from Nordic mythology, it was according to the rules of 'the higher history painting', meaning that he adjusted himself to its stiff conventional and theatrical manner. A painting like 'Loki and Sigyn', made in 1852, worried his friends because of its lack of temperament. But when Blommér sent this painting and the large composition *Freja bland molnen sökande sin försvunne make* ('Freya among the Clouds Seeking her Vanished Mate') (Figure 6.2.2.6) in the same year, the professors were sat-

Figure 6.2.2.7. Detail of a fountain designed by Johan Peter Molin.
Sweden, Stockholm Kungsträdgården. Realy Easy Star/Tullio Valente/Alamy.

isfied. Gratefully they noted the new direction in Blommér's art towards 'a higher and nobler goal'.

This last painting became the best known of Blommér's works. Among possible models for it in Rome there is Guido Reni's *Aurora* in the Palazzo Rospigliosi, showing the sun-wagon which rolls above the clouds while a putto floats over the horses, and the fresco *The Triumphal Entry of Bacchus* by Annibale Carraci in the Palazzo Farnese, where the wine-god sits in a carriage drawn by tigers. A putto holds the reins and genies hover over the carriage. In Blommér's painting, Freya's chariot is drawn by two of her cats, according to the description in Snorri's *Edda*. Freya has golden yellow hair and blue eyes. She wears a red and white dress, has a double golden necklace and, around her right arm, a spiral golden ring. On the hem of her dress there are runes as well as on the rune-stave in her right hand. The runes proclaim: 'Blommér painted this in Rome in 1852'. The Nordic theme is also expressed by the dragon arabesques on the chariot's railings, shafts and wheels. But apart from these details there is nothing in the painting that says anything other than that it was made in

Italian surroundings and was marked by the weak mannerism of the nineteenth century, with a touch of the Nazarene movement, mirrored in the melancholic, contemplative eyes of Freya. The ambition to let nature and man form a unity is gone. In a safe academic way the figures dominate the space. There is no landscape whatsoever. The equipage passes by on a bed of clouds, which meets with a sky, fading into blue. Blommér would probably have continued to paint in this manner if he had not suddenly died in Rome in 1853 at the age of only thirty-seven (Grandien 1987: 146–52).

The sculptor Johan Peter Molin was one of the many individuals who carried with them memories of folk-tales and stories from childhood. He was very familiar with Norse as well as classical subjects. In Rome, where he was at the same time as Blommér, he sculpted now Amor and sleeping Bacchantines, now Ingeborg by the sea, deep in meditation, with Frithiof's arm-ring in her hand. In the spring of 1853, the same year that he returned to Stockholm, he modelled a sketch for Loki and Höder, at the moment the latter has just shot the arrow at Balder. Five years later, in Paris, he engaged himself once more in a work connected with Nordic subjects, which resulted in the sculpture group 'The Belt Tighteners'. This shows two men, intertwined in a violent knife fight. The subject was taken from Hyltén-Cavallius, who had written an article about the expression 'to tighten the belt', a term for a special kind of duel in which the combatants were tied together with rope. This custom was still vivid in the minds of people in distant parts of the country. It is exactly this duel that Molin visualizes in his sculpture group. The two combatants fight for their lives, but they are equally strong, and neither wins over the other, which is why the group expresses a perfect state of equilibrium between two opposite forces. Each movement in one is matched by a similar tension in the other. In this way a classical balance is achieved, in spite of the two figures expressing a maximum of strength, manifested in tense muscles, flying mantles and dramatic temperament. On the four sides of the base, Molin has depicted in relief the actions that precede and follow the duel. The reliefs were given an explanatory text in runes within dragon arabesques.

This sculpture group was first made in plaster and shown in 1860 at the Academy's exhibition in Stockholm, where it met with no sensation, but in 1862 in Berlin, where it had been sent to be cast in bronze, it achieved great success. The success was even greater in London, where it was shown at the World Exhibition in the same year. Despite the fact that the artist had wanted to depict a Nordic subject, it seems to have been the classicism in the sculpture that aroused admiration. One critic in Berlin declared that if the group had been created during the heyday of Greek art and exhibited in some public area the whole of Hellas would have admired it and given the artist the wreath of victory. After

London, success also followed in Sweden, and copies began to be made to be erected in public places. One of them is now to be found in the park outside the National Museum in Stockholm, another by Kungsportsaveny in Gothenburg.

But Molin had not forgotten his old inclination towards nature and folk culture. This is evident from a plaster fountain he made for the Scandinavian art and industrial exhibition in Stockholm in 1866 (Figure 6.2.2.7). The subject matter was well known to the public and had been disseminated through both text and images, also through music. When Molin chose the motif he also thought of the place where the fountain was going to be put up. The exhibition was to be held in Kungsträdgården, close to Norrström, where Lake Mälar meets with the salty water from the sea. This was suitably illustrated by the Nicker and Ægir with his daughters.

The fountain unavoidably became one more example of the encounter between the classical and the Nordic. Influences from many quarters meet in this work. There is something of the spirit of Bernini in the spiral log that holds up the crowning basin from where the water pours down over the sides of the sculpture. Michelangelo's Moses has lent his traces to Ægir and Thorvaldsen's Apollo with the swan is a model for the Nicker, who here is not represented as a respectable old man but as a youngster. Yieldingly neoclassical are also the dreaming and listening, naked females who represent the daughters, slightly individualised in accordance with their Nordic roles: the false, veiled Ran, the creator of storms Olga, the heavenly clear Himinglöva and so on.

But the basic idea of the fountain is not plastic. The similarity to Blommér's 'The Nicker and the Daughters of Ægir' is obvious, not only in its emotional effect but also in the depiction of the motif, for the intention here has also been to create a piece of art in which figures and background form a unity. It is for that reason that the daughters sit comfortably grouped in six niches among sculpted water plants and dripstone formations. Molin wanted to underline the correspondence between the mythological beings and their environment, or in a wider sense, the relationship between man and the landscape. Therefore Molin's fountain is a piece of Romantic art. That was also how the critics saw it. Here they had found a piece of work in which nature has been merged with Nordic tradition. The wider public was just as positive, and the deep impression the sculpture made was strengthened by an acoustic effect: the splashing of the water drops in the pond, which surrounded it, was mixed with the sound from an orchestra that sat beside it, playing folk-songs. Here sculpture, music and the splashing of water thus worked together.

The fountain created a focus in the industrial department of the exhibition, in which the Scandinavian countries, on the brink of industrialization, showed

for the first time what they could achieve on a large scale. With the fountain, surrounded by showcases displaying industrial products, Norse mythology was also for the first time used as a commercial symbol. The Old Norse theme not only stood for the retrospective or for quiet melancholy but also for enterprise and a national generation of power. Even steam locomotives were named after Nordic gods. The thought that the sculpture should be cast in bronze came up immediately. A collection was started among the public and raised a large enough sum already in the following year. The fountain was cast and in 1872 was placed in Kungsträdgården, where it still stands — with retained popularity (Grandien 1987: 152–57).

Aside from Blommér, it was Mårten Eskil Winge and August Malmström among the painters who most whole-heartedly devoted themselves to Old Norse subjects. Both, especially Winge, worked in the spirit of the academic tradition, while Malmström's art slowly opened itself towards the new *plein air* painting. Some of Malmström's paintings as well as his book illustrations still hold their attraction. Winge's works seem to have fallen deeper into oblivion, the reason being that most of them are so bound to their literary context that they have come to seem incomprehensible to those who do not have the key. Only the immense 'Thor's Fight with the Giants' is now and then exhibited. Normally it is rolled up at the far end of the storeroom of the National Museum, like the dragon Fafnir resting on its gold (see further Grandien 1987: 157–63). Winge was not attracted by the supernatural beings of the folk-tales but by big, high-mythological subjects and he therefore followed the tradition of history painting, primarily of subjects from Old Norse heroic sagas. He planned his study trip to Düsseldorf and Paris, where, in 1859, he painted his first version of *Kraka before her visit to Ragnar Lodbrok*, followed in 1862 by a new version and in 1863 by the large canvas *Loki and Sigyn*. *Kraka* was shown at the Academy and was a great success. It was bought by Carl XV, while *Loki and Sigyn* was acquired by the National Museum. By then Winge had already returned to Stockholm and in the middle of the 1860s was made professor at the Academy. In his studio he diligently continued working on Old Norse compositions. He also generously published his Old Norse visions as vignettes and illustrations in the press.

The most important works in Winge's production are the already mentioned *Loki and Sigyn* from 1863, and *Tors strid med jättarna* ('Thor's Fight with the Giants') from 1872. The first of these, which he painted in Rome, is 3.5 metres high and 2.75 metres broad, while the second measures 4.87 metres × 3.36 metres. These immense measurements say something about the painter's intentions. From early on he was determined to create monumental art that would

Figure 6.2.2.8. Mårten Eskil Winge, *Tors strid med jättarna* ('Thor's Fight with the Giants'). 1872. NM1250. Photo: National Museum, Stockholm.

be shown to a broad public. Like Grundtvig he had found that the Old Norse myths contained moral messages, which it was the interpreter's duty to preach to his contemporaries. In *Loki and Sigyn* he wanted to illustrate the power of self-sacrificing love, which does not hesitate even before the representatives of Evil and Betrayal.

Tors strid med jättarna (Figure 6.2.2.8) shows high up in the picture young Thor come roaring down from the skies in his chariot, drawn by his two enormous goats, to fight against the giants who fall over each other helplessly. The painting is an illusionist test of power with an almost three-dimensional effect, created by the contrasts between light and shadow. A moral perspective is consequently effected. The spectator seems to find himself in the darkness among the fallen giants and sees Thor come charging up there, as a furious punisher from the sky. His dark opponents defend themselves against this angry figure of light, shielding their eyes with their hands while they tumble backwards. With the left hand the god has taken a steady grip on the hair of one of the giants at the same time as he directs a killing blow towards him. In this he swings the flashing axe (not hammer) Miollner with his eyes fixed on his victim, who in vain tries to overturn the chariot, a racing chariot closest to a Roman model. In contrast to the giants, Thor, wearing a red garment, is blond, blue-eyed and clean-shaven, with swelling muscles. Around his neck he carries jewellery in the archaeologically exact style that Winge had learned from experts in the field. The belt is decorated with a swastika.

What then was the message of the painting that would motivate the huge format? To start with, it might seem to be the conviction that moral right is always the same as physical strength, a trait which can make the contemporary viewer slightly uneasy. But if one puts Winge's canvas — and the enthusiastic reception it got — in relation to its times, it is possible to regard it as yet one more expression of the fighting spirit of the 1860s, formulated in the Old Norse symbolical language that by now was understood by everybody. In the struggle there were included actions of solidarity against the powers of despotism and darkness. People engaged themselves for Poland against Russia and for the Italian people's struggle for freedom under the leadership of Giuseppe Garibaldi; Winge himself belonged to activist national liberal circles. But maybe there was, if the attempts to interpret the painting are slightly extended, yet another component. In the spirit of the 1860s there was also the conviction of being on the threshold of another era, when technology, science and enlightenment would burst forth. Darkness would be dispersed, and the blind forces of nature would be tamed.

It is interesting that the young Strindberg was at first fascinated by this painting, in which he found idealism and a holy fury that agreed with his own

attitude to life. In a newspaper article from 1872 he praised the high style of the painting and its Nordic subject. But it did not take long for Strindberg to withdraw his praise and to find that time all too quickly had overtaken Winge. The symbolic language was worn out. No one believed any more in any gods whatsoever, least of all in Thor (cf. Söderström 1972: 40; Strindberg 1981: 128–30).

Striking in Winge is his 100 per cent engagement. He never seems to have doubted the influential force of his works. In August Malmström the heaviness is lightened by a more lyrical tone, a stronger imaginative urge and above all by the beginnings of a visualization of nature. Besides, he was more many sided and prolific than Winge. During his study years at the Academy, he painted classical prize subjects, mostly with historical or biblical motifs, in a stiff academic style. In 1856 he went on his scholarship journey, first to Düsseldorf, then in 1857–59 to Paris, where he studied with Thomas Couture. From him he learned to give his paintings the warm, golden-brown overall tone which is so typical of the master (Grandien 1987: 163–70).

In 1856 he sent home from Düsseldorf the painting *Heimer and Auslog* and the following year from Paris a larger canvas, *King Ella's Messenger before Ragnar Lodbrok's Sons*, the latter a prize subject from the Academy. Back in Stockholm in 1864 Malmström set about working on a piece which would follow him around forever and be a source of both trouble and joy: the monumental *Bråvallaslaget* ('The Battle of Bråvalla') (Old Norse *Brávellir*). The subject borders on both myth and history. Saxo Grammaticus tells in his *Gesta Danorum* of a terrible battle between the Danish army under Harald Hildetand 'War-Tooth', old and blind, and the army of the Swedes, led by Sigurd Ring. The legendary battle finishes with a Danish defeat and the death of Harald Hildetand. The artist was to make two versions of this large painting. The first is completely marked by the manner of painting Malmström had been taught in Paris: a large heroic and romantic version set in an ideal landscape. It shows a swarm of people, living and dead. To the right the dying king lies in his wagon, and in the middle the hero Starkodder (Starkaðr) raises his arm to strike with an axe. To the left the painting is dominated by a covered wagon, where women bandage the wounded. Between the covered wagon and Starkodder a valkyrie holds up her banner above the swarm, and above the whole scene, among the clouds, a hazy troop comes charging on their horses. They are the dead warriors on their way to Valhalla; one of them already bears Harald Hildetand's features.

The sky and the sea-bay faintly seen in the background are clear blue, while the dominant colour scheme is drab, brown- and yellow-shining. The lighting is theatrical with single light effects that penetrate the obscurity and highlight details and features. Models might have been Eugène Delacroix, Vernet or

Figure 6.2.2.9. August Malmström, *Brávallaslaget* ('The Battle of Bravalla'), *c.* 1860s. NM6852. Photo: Åsa Lundén/National Museum, Stockholm.

even French painters of the Orient; the battle could as well have taken place in Turkey or Greece. Probably it was also his consciousness that the painting was not Nordic enough, either in colour, landscape or in its figures, which made Malmström reject it. One day he drove his pallet knife through Starkodder's face and rolled the canvas up for good. But he did not give up. In 1867 he got to work on the second version, a canvas 3.8 metre high and 6.25 metre across which stretched the whole length of his studio in Stockholm. He would be working on this for the rest of his life, without ever considering himself finished with it.

The subject of the second version is the same as the first, as, in general, is the grouping of the figures. But the differences are large. The warm obscurity gave way to a cold steel-grey daylight and a greater sharpness, and the landscape has a more obvious geographical fixation in terms of place. Gone are the theatrical lighting effects. The fallen warriors riding in the clouds have been reduced to lightly stylized hints, as one of the means by which Malmström tried to make the second version more realistic. The combatants have been given clearer contours and an individual characterization. Weapons and costumes are carefully studied, something which bears witness to increased access to archaeological information. Starkodder is no longer fighting with a man but with a furious maiden, the valkyrie Ursina, who fights on the side of the Danes. Instead of the elevated heroic tone of the first version, the hand-to-hand battle between men is shown here almost realistically. The faces of both heroes and valkyries express fear and fury.

While the first version of *Bråvallaslaget* depicted it as a scene from a heroic saga, where only the heroes have leading roles and the others form an anonymous mass, the second (Figure 6.2.2.9) is informed by a more sober conception of reality. The battle is resolute and cruel. The warriors have become separate individuals, each one fighting for his or her life. There can be many reasons for this change, one being that Malmström had acquired a more democratic perspective on war and its reality over the years; a democratic attitude was also more typical of the Sweden of the 1860s. The artistic change might also have come about because Malmström had slowly gone over to a manner of painting more influenced by French *plein air* painting than by the older, Romantic history painting. It was that which made the cold light of dawn replace the warm studio atmosphere and the clearly stamped Nordic landscape make its entrance instead of the conventional scene world. Both versions of the painting were taken care of after the artist's death in 1901. The first has occupied a place of honour in the Stockholm City Hall since 1921 and the second is hanging in Östergötland's Museum in Linköping.

Figure 6.2.2.10. August Malmström, *Älvalek* ('Elves at Play'). 1866. NM1223. Photo: National Museum, Stockholm.

Figure 6.2.2.11. Carl Larsson, *Midvinterblot* ('Midwinter Sacrifice'). 1915. NM6971. Photo: Hans Thorwid/National Museum.

Malmström came into contact with the new French atmosphere and landscape painting through the works of Charles-François Daubigny and Camille Corot in Paris in 1860–63. He probably had Corot's silver shimmering nature lyricism in mind when he began to study the Swedish landscape, with the painting *Älvalek* ('Elves at Play') from 1866 as the foremost result (Figure 6.2.2.10). With that he brought up to date the tradition from Blommér, who had painted *Älvdansen* sixteen years earlier in the spirit of the folk-tales. But while Blommér had represented the elves as tangible in body as in a ballet by the contemporary Dane August Bournonville, Malmström painted them as a rhythmical billowing veil of mist, in which features and forms can barely be distinguished. It is almost the same difference as that between the clearly drawn dead warriors in the clouds on their way to Valhalla in the first version of *Bråvallaslaget* and the more diffusedly suggested heavenly troop in the second version. A similar difference exists between the painting *Heimer and Auslog* which the artist made in Düsseldorf in 1856 and a new painting of the same motif from 1868.

Malmström was also active as an illustrator of books within the Norse subject field, particularly with Tegnér's *Frithiof's Saga*, a poem that has tempted a great many illustrators. Malmström's Frithiof images, also widely influential in Germany, came to be decisive in determining the general idea of what the Old Norse world had looked like, in that way playing the same role as Frølich's illustrations in Denmark. It was above all in the form of illustrations and vignette art that the Old Norse movement lived on in Sweden until the turn of the twentieth century. For that there was still a great demand. The monumental terminal point was set with the art historian Fredrik Sander's translation of the Poetic Edda in 1893, a magnificent volume almost five hundred pages long, illustrated by twenty-five artists who contributed with sixty larger and 130 smaller drawings, all xylographed. Great care was devoted to the typography. The text-face on each page was surrounded by a frame in several colours, and inside the ornaments there are images of mythical plants and animals and archaeological motifs. The archaeological objects were drawn with scientific accuracy by a specialist, the draughtsman Olof Sörling. Among the participants were the new times' modern artists like Carl Larsson, Anders Zorn, Bruno Liljefors and Georg Pauli. But despite the large number of prominent artists, or maybe because of it, the result was not successful, the reason being its miscellaneous character and lack of homogeneity, although there are some splendid exceptions. At the same time as this magnificent volume was the apex of the Old Norse movement it also marks its finishing point. When, as in Denmark, art took new turns, there was no reason to hold on to this antiquarian genre. It blew away together with the rest of the studio dust with the breakthrough of

Realism and Naturalism in the 1880s. The National Romantic art of the turn of the century had totally different means of expression.

A little way into the twentieth century there occurred a brilliant exception in the form of Carl Larsson's monumental painting *Midvinterblot* ('Midwinter Sacrifice') (Figure 6.2.2.11), intended for the National Museum. In 1896 Larsson had already completed the task of decorating the six large wall panels in the lower part of the Museum's central staircase. When he was asked later to decorate one of the remaining panels in the upper part of the staircase, he chose the theme of Gustav Vasa's entry into Stockholm in 1521. It takes place on a beautiful day in early summer, and the young king rides on a white horse up to the city gate decorated with flowers; there he is received by the bowing townspeople.

But the last panel remained. Larsson wanted to fill that one also and conceived of a Nordic midwinter sacrifice as a contrast to the bright summer picture. The subject would be King Domalde (Old Norse Dómaldi) who steps forward to sacrifice himself for his people, after three harvests had failed and famine had broken out. The source is Snorri Sturluson's narrative in *Ynglinga saga*, which is itself based on the poem *Ynglingatal* ('Enumeration of the Ynglingar'), ascribed to the late ninth-century Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr of Hvinir. Carl Larsson, once a radical and one of the opponents of the Academy, had been strongly taken by the nationalistic ideas of the time and seems to have seen the king as a patriotic example for everyone to follow.

Larsson developed his first draft in several separate sketches until the work was finished in 1915, in the shape of a 6.5 by 13.5 metre oil painting. This was hung up as a test on the intended wall panel. The action depicted takes place against the background of a wooden heathen temple with features of a stave church. It is richly decorated with hammered gold plates and two Chinese lions that guard the portal. The king is being taken on a sleigh to the waiting sacrificial priests. He has pushed his fur coat to the side and stands naked in tense devotion, with his eyes turned towards the sky. In the foreground one of the priests, the executioner, is shown from the back. He wears a long red robe and stands ready with the knife behind his back. Another priest raises his Thor's hammer in order to strike the next minute. To the left the queen is lying on the ground stretched out in despair. Warriors with shields, horn-blowers and ecstatically dancing Sámi women surround the whole. Everything gleams and glitters with clear colours and gold; the effective superficiality typical of the Jugend-style contributes to the overall impression.

But this work — from the first sketches to the finished result — awoke a storm of criticism and a debate of seldom-seen intensity. People turned against the gold and coloured splendour, against the freely mixed formal elements,

against the lack of archaeological correctness. That the adorer of the family idyll (as Carl Larsson had become known) would create a work of this kind seemed incomprehensible. The criticism was also political — conservatives and radicals joined in — and people turned against the sacrifice motif itself. Many felt the representation to be unpleasant, 'nauseating', and there was a suspicion of autobiographical elements behind the emotional strength. Shocking also was the sight of the unprotected nakedness of the king in the immediate vicinity of the drawn, glittering knife, thus intensifying the painting's features of violence and sexuality.

To Larsson the unappreciative reception of the painting was a catastrophe from which he never recovered; he died in 1919. The National Museum refused to buy it. The painting was taken down, hung up on trial once more in 1925, was debated for and against and taken down again in 1933. Nine years later it was deposited in The Museum of Sketches in Lund. In 1983–84 it was exhibited at the History Museum in Stockholm and caused a fierce new debate. Subsequently it was acquired by private speculators who sold it on to a Japanese buyer for 8.8 million Swedish crowns. Once returned to Sweden, it was bought by the National Museum in 1992 — which only then acknowledged its merits — for 14.5 million Swedish crowns. And since then it has been hanging in its intended place.

Maybe when it was created *Midvinterblot* was not totally 'out of its time'. The first performance of Igor Stravinsky's 'The Rite of Spring' in Paris in 1913 had aroused a large international sensation, and the mythographer Sir James Fraser's influential work *The Golden Bough*, in which fertility rites and human sacrifice were central subjects, was published in its fullest version in 1906–15.

The same motif, of the fertility cult, is also to be found in a large sculptural work from this period: Bror Marklund's bronze doors for the National History Museum in Stockholm, which was built in 1939–40. He had won the competition for the decoration of the doors, where the given task was to depict Nordic history from the past till the beginning of the medieval period. During a period of thirteen years (1939–52), Marklund worked on the portals, which he decorated with images in an archaizing and primitivist style, made as carvings and low and high reliefs. The main character of the Heathen Portal is the one-eyed Odin, who is shown in supernatural size. Around him there is a mass of scenes: sacrifices of animals and men, the baiting of horses, fights with lances, shield and bow, the blowing of lurs and banquets. The second portal is dominated by the missionary Ansgar, barefoot, with a stave church in the background and surrounded by working people and crusaders. As the basis of his representation, Marklund had made very careful archaeological studies, both in museums and

in literature. Flint daggers, boat axes, Bronze Age shields and dragon ships are thus correctly depicted but without intruding on the artistic whole. Hundreds of sketches have been saved from the working process, showing how carefully the artist has tried to enter into the distant past he wanted to depict. The fertility god from Lunda (possibly Freyr) is there as well as the dance around the phallus stone from Grebo in Östergötland. But as Mjöberg points out (1967–68: II, 266), symbols like that have been more discretely inserted into the finished piece of work — although one of the portals' handles is a phallus.

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6.2.3 – Painting and Sculpture in Norway

Bo Grandien†
translated from the Swedish by Inga-Lena Angström Grandien

In a book on Norway and the Munich school of painting, the art historian Knut Ljøgodt (2002: 40–41) discusses the relatively low occurrence of motifs from the Norse and Icelandic cultural sphere in Norwegian nineteenth-century art. This is particularly obvious in comparison with the widespread presence of those motifs in Danish and, above all, Swedish art. This state of things is apparently paradoxical since the connection of one's own country to the Old Nordic past was nowhere as strongly stressed as in Norway. That was a natural consequence of the political upheavals at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when, after four hundred years, the country regained its self-government only to be forced into a union with Sweden and therefore had to stand up for its independence. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Snorri Sturluson's history of the kings of Norway, *Heimskringla*, had become popular reading. For Norway the era of Viking Age and medieval independence, stretching from the ninth to the end of the fourteenth century, when the union with Denmark put an end to self-government, was the epoch which Norwegians looked back to for inspiration in the battle for national liberation. During its golden age, Norway had been a mighty sea empire, which had come to include Iceland, Greenland and the Orkney and Shetland Islands. The fact that Icelandic culture had emanated from Norway was especially emphasised.

Bo Grandien (1932–2014) was a writer, poet, and Professor of the History of Art at Stockholm University. His work focused on how the past is represented in the visual arts of the nineteenth century: *Drömmen om medeltiden*, 1974; *Drömmen om renässansen*, 1978; *Vindruvans glöd — nygöticistiskt i tanke konst och miljö under 1800-talet*, 1987.

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume 1: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 503–520
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115272

Why do we see so little of this in the visual arts — in contrast to literature — in the nineteenth century? One answer is that Norway, unlike Denmark and Sweden, lacked a tradition of history painting. To this it can be added that at the beginning of the century the country had no fine art tradition of its own. Instead the landscapes by Johan Christian Dahl and the folk-life depictions by Adolph Tidemand came to serve as guidance for artists. National identity was expressed through these genres — a task which in most other European countries was fulfilled through idealising representations of the nation's heroic past. Ljøgodt (2002: 40–41) has shown that there is by no means a lack of works with motifs from Norse mythology and the history of the past in Norwegian nineteenth-century art. Yet they have ended in the shadow, and in volume four of *Norges Kunsthistorie* (Berg and Norberg-Schulz 1981–83), which deals with this period, hardly any such works are mentioned.

Norway seemed a backward country to the faintly cosmopolitan culture of eighteenth-century Denmark and Sweden. However, with the coming of Romanticism there was a change in attitude. In the spirit of Rousseau the Norwegians came to be idealized as admirable, hard-working peasant people with Old Nordic virtues. This new view became influential in *Det norske selskab* ('The Norwegian Society') in Copenhagen in the 1780s and 1790s, and the free yeomen in the valleys of Norway were contrasted with Denmark's peasants living in virtual serfdom. In the Danish circles in which the history and archaeology of Scandinavia were being studied, there was a growing interest in the provinces in the North, and in the castle park of Fredensborg, Christian VII had an area called Nordmansdalen ('the Valley of the Northmen') arranged, adorned with sculptures representing Norwegian peasants. At the same time, in the same spirit of Rousseau, people began to reassess the natural environment of Norway itself, which until then had been rejected as gruesome and frightening but now came to be seen as grandiose, majestic and sublime. In 1788 the Danish painter Erik Pauelsen travelled to Norway to depict this wild nature. His sketches were later converted into paintings with grand motifs such as rapids, waterfalls and mountains. In 1792 he was followed by Christian August Lorentzen, who came there to make 'prospects' or landscapes. Thus it was two Danes who for the first time, and in all seriousness, started to use the Norwegian landscape as a motif for the visual arts.

In 1814, after seven years of war, Norway separated from Denmark and became self-governing. The Danish state's bankruptcy at the time also affected Norway; finances were tottering, commerce and shipping had diminished. The recovery took time, and it was not until around 1840 that the state of things stabilized. The writers fared better, but for the visual arts totally new institu-

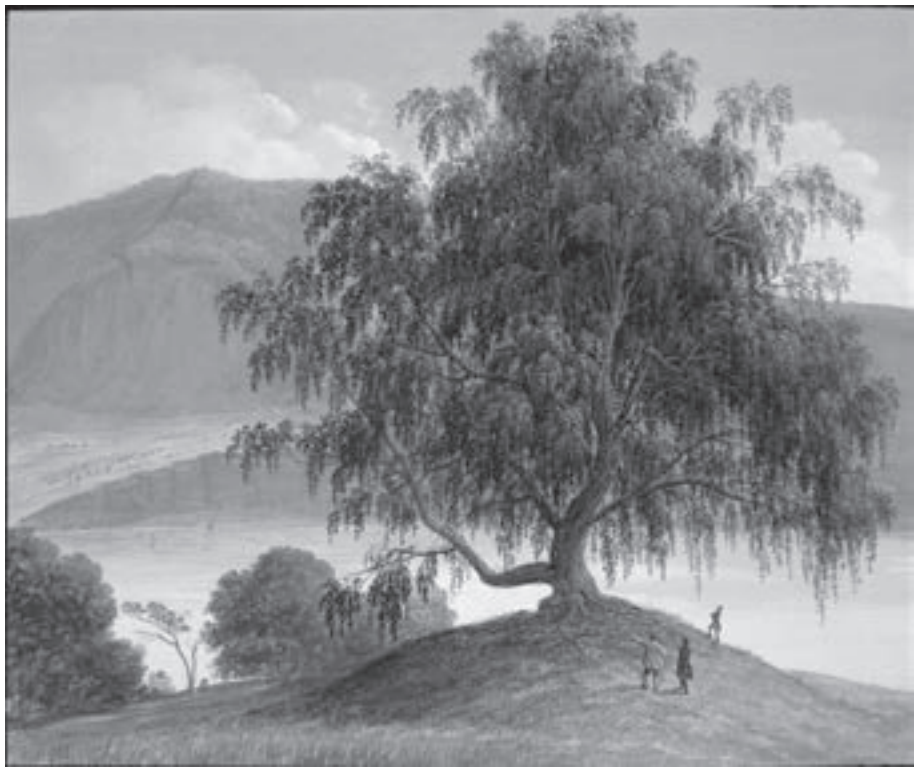

Figure 6.2.3.1. Johannes Flintoe, *Slindebirken* ('Old Birch Tree at Slinde by the Sognefjord'). *c*. 1820 NGM 02266 © Photo: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

tions had to be built up. It also took a long time before a public with greater spending power emerged. The leading artists had to find purchasers elsewhere. After studies in Copenhagen, Munich or Düsseldorf, they settled down abroad and returned to their native country only for summer excursions. With few exceptions it was only in the 1880s — with the coming of Romanticism — that they could establish themselves permanently in Norway.

One of the first artists to derive his inspiration from the Norwegian mountains was Johannes Flintoe, born two years before Paulsen's pioneer trip and trained in Copenhagen. For more than forty years he worked as a landscape painter. In that capacity, he was the first to depict the so-called Slinde birch tree in the 1820s near the farm Indre Slinde in Sogn, which soon became one of the most popular motifs in both poetry and the visual arts (Figure 6.2.3.1). The thick growing birch was standing on top of a grave mound by the Sognefjord and was regarded as a holy tree. According to popular beliefs there was a mysti-

cal connection between the person interred in the mound and the tree on top. Over many generations the owners of the farm were in the habit of pouring a jug of beer over its roots every Christmas. In Flintoe's picture, a gouache, three men in the shape of tiny figures are standing in veneration before the birch. It is a beautiful summer's day; the fjord lies bright as a mirror.

In 1819 Flintoe visited Balestrand by the same fjord and made a painting of a large ash tree which grew on what was considered to be the grave of King Bele. The connection of this place with the Frithiof saga (*Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*, 'The Saga of Friðþjófr the Bold') — which goes back to an Icelandic saga from the fourteenth century and was thought to have taken place in Viking-Age Norway — made Flintoe return several times. Bele (Beli), the father of the saga's heroine, Ingeborg (Ingibjörg), was believed to lie in the mound, and on the opposite side of the fjord is Vangsnes — the Framnes of the saga — where Frithiof is supposed to have lived on his ancestral farm (Simonnaes 1977: 35; Grandien 2005: 144).

Flintoe also tried his hand at mythological motifs. In 1818 he painted *Torshov* ('Thor's Temple'), representing the god Thor's dwelling. The painting is an eloquent testimony to the difficulties painters had at the time in trying to imagine what the mythical milieux might have looked like. Interestingly enough, Flintoe does not have recourse to classical models like contemporary Danish artists, but instead creates a building inspired by Norwegian Romanesque and Gothic church architecture. The painting shows a broad nave under high vaults, flanked by several aisles with pointed arches. In the chancel there is a depiction of Thor with his goats, and in front of this is a choir screen with pointed arches, decorated with hanging shields. In the foreground there is a large sacrificial bowl. Some single figures move about in the large room. One contemporary poet was so much taken by the painting that he wrote an admiring poem about it: in it, he describes the broad, strong vaults of stone as 'a symbol of Nordic primitive power' (cf. Mjöberg 1967–68: I, 81).

Holmgång ved Skiringsal ('Duel at Skiringsal') is the name of a painting that Flintoe executed in the 1830s. In early Norway and Iceland *holmganga* was the name of a type of duel fought according to certain rules, usually on an island or in some other isolated place. One of the rules was that the duel had to take place within a delimited area. Flintoe chose the area created by the stones of a judging ring, and located the action on a hill in an existing geographical place in the southern part of the county of Vestfold. The water we glimpse here and there in the background is the Oslo-fjord, Viken. There once lay a long-vanished merchant town called Skíringssalr in Old Norse, whose existence has since been confirmed by modern archaeological excavations. In the background

Figure 6.2.3.2. Johan Christian Dahl, *Vinter ved Sognefjorden* ('Winter by the Sognefjord'). 1827. NGM 03138 © Photo: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

of the painting Flintoe has depicted the town as he imagined it and placed ships in the harbour.

He also illustrated the politician, industrialist and historian Jacob Aal's interpretation of Snorri's *Heimskringla*, which was published in three volumes in 1838–39. The illustrations are images of the Norwegian landscape, with its rapids, glaciers and high mountains, itself regarded as a direct reference to and from the heroic period of the North. This same understanding can be seen very clearly in the work of Johan Christian Dahl, who, after a long study period in Copenhagen, settled permanently in Dresden and there established contact with the Dresden circle of Romantic poets and painters, particularly with Caspar David Friedrich. More than anyone else he created the image of the Norwegian fjord-landscape, resting in sunlit majesty or wrapped in winter haze. His base for the paintings was the exact observations of nature that he drew in his sketchbooks during many summer excursions in Norway, supple-

mented by his knowledge of subjects such as geology and meteorology. With all this as a support, he executed his paintings in his studio in Dresden. Dahl was a Realist, but a Romantic trait appears every now and then when the motifs are cast in an heroic light. In various ways he also expressed his conviction that land and nature were firmly united with the Norwegian people and its history.

An Old Norse 'marker' in his art is the bauta-stone or standing stone, called *bautasteinn* in some Old Norse texts. The best known example is the painting *Vinter ved Sognefjorden* ('Winter by the Sognefjord') from 1827 (Figure 6.2.3.2). In a grey-cold, quiet and still fjord-landscape with thin snow on the ground and gloomy brooding mountain massifs with dark slopes on the other side of the fjord's mirroring water, a bauta-stone rises, dark and rugged, in the foreground. The sketch for the finished work was made one day in August 1826; the winter landscape was added by Dahl in the studio. This painting is also fixed to a special geographical area; Dahl had made the sketch in Nornes with Fimreite on the other side of the fjord. That is where King Sverre (Sverrir, r. 1177–1202) defeated his rival Magnus Erlingsson in 1184, and it seems quite certain that Dahl had that battle in mind (Lange 1988: 184–85, 210, 224, 239).

There are two bauta-stones in Nornes, and, in a small painting, *Hoyonn mellom bautasteiner på Nornes* ('Hay-Reaping between Bauta-Stones at Nornes'), from 1839, the old stone monuments are shown standing in a field with haystacks and present-day hay-makers. Between the two rises a third high vertical in the shape of a holy birch. Dahl made the drawing for this painting in the same place and on the same day in August 1826, but this time he let a warm evening sun light up the landscape while the mountains fade into blue in the background and the sky takes on a pink tone. From his sketches from the summer trip in 1826 there stem also two later executed paintings with motifs from the Slinde-birch. One is a summer picture and shows the birch in roughly the same way as in Flintoe's gouache; in the foreground there are two figures, one of them is a peasant who shows the tree to a visitor. But Dahl lets the birch take up a much larger part of the pictorial space, and has placed a bauta-stone near the grave mound. The stone is in reality standing several hundred metres away, but the intention of the artist was probably to strengthen the connection between the past and the present, in the same way as he lets the peasant represent the continuity between the person interred in the grave mound and the present-day people living in the area. The second one, 'The Slinde-Birch in the Winter' from 1835, shows the same tree on a grey-cold winter's day surrounded by snow. The bauta-stone is included here too, although shown from a different angle (Lange 1988: 210, 224, 239).

Dahl himself wrote that his trips in Norway were only intended for painting but that the history of his native country lay close to his heart and that the spirits of the ancestors still spoke to him in the visible remembrances — bautastones and even more poignantly in the ancient buildings (Lange 1988: 242, 334). Dahl was one of the first people to appreciate the medieval Norwegian stave churches. He saved one of them, Vang, from being torn down by buying it — it was later under the name of Wang to end up in the Riesengebirge in what was then Germany, now Poland. In 1836–37 he published in Dresden a large volume of pictures of Norwegian wooden architecture, *Denkmale einer sehr ausgebildeten Holzbaukunst aus den frühesten Jahrhunderten in den inneren Landschaften Norwegens* ('Monuments of a Very Skilful Art of Wood Carving from the Earliest Centuries in the Inland Regions of Norway').

Another of the great Norwegian artists of this period, Adolph Tidemand, studied for five years at the Art Academy in Copenhagen before continuing to Munich and Rome. In 1842–45 he made an attempt to establish himself in Christiania (now Oslo) before once more settling down abroad, mainly in Düsseldorf. Tidemand began as a history painter but attempted also every now and then to make paintings with Old Norse motifs, some taken from the very popular *Frithiofs saga*. In his painting 'Frithiof Takes Leave of Ingeborg', the classicist tradition still prevails. Ingeborg appears in a dress in Empire style, while Frithiof has been given a helmet and a Roman cuirass, a Roman frock and Roman half-long stockings. To avoid these kinds of anachronisms in the future, Tidemand began to study at the Archaeological Museum in Christiania, with the result that his next painting, 'The Death of Håkon Jarl', is marked by a greater archaeological realism in the rendering of the costumes. The carefully worked-out frame shows that he also had studied old Norwegian wood-carving of the kind that is found in the stave church portals (Mjöberg 1967–68: I, 22, 44–47, 67–68).

After a summer trip in 1843 in the Norwegian countryside Tidemand decided to concentrate completely on the depiction of the life and manners of the contemporary Norwegian common people. Just as the Norway of the past seemed to mirror itself in the Norwegian landscape, the peasants, preferably in the distant mountain valleys or living by the deeply indented fjords, could be regarded in a similar way and seen as descendants of the old gods and the ancestors. This agreed with what Høyen had argued in a speech in Copenhagen in 1843 and what the poet Johan Sebastian Welhaven had said before the students in Kristiania in 1846. Nothing in the North was as moving as a Norwegian mountain valley, he emphasized, where the people still carried the language of the saga period on their lips and lived as the Æsir once did.

In 1850 King Oscar I established himself in Christiania and raised money for the building of the royal pavilion Oscarshal. A number of artists were engaged for the decoration, much of it depicting the Viking-Age and medieval kings of Norway and Icelandic sagas that could be connected with Norway. The *Frithiof saga* was what Oscar I valued most. For the so-called Frithiof-room Christian Borch sculpted a series of medallions with motifs from the saga. Hans Gude painted two large landscapes from the Sognefjord, where the saga is supposed to have taken place. One of them, made in 1851, shows Balestrand as seen from Framnes. In the middle of the fjord, Frithof's Viking ship runs before a strong wind. The square sail is filled and the dragon's head boldly raised above the foaming waves. The hero himself stands in the stem.

Gude had been in Balestrand in 1849, and the sketches he had made there were used in his paintings for Oscarshal. This area held a great attraction for artists. In 1826 Dahl and his pupil Thomas Fearnley were in Vangsnes, and they returned there several times. The Swedish artist Carl Johan Fahlcrantz was in the neighbourhood in 1827 and painted the grave mound and the bauta-stones at Nornes. In 1839 Fearnley returned in the company of Andreas Achenbach from Düsseldorf and the Polish painter Christian Breslauer and met there with Dahl and his pupil Knut Baade. With the help of his sketches, Fearnley painted *Kung Beles Gravhaug* ('King Bele's Grave Mound') and *Slindebirken* ('The Slinde Birch (Figure 6.2.3.3). Fearnley's version of the latter motif is considered to be one of the highlights of Norwegian Romantic landscape painting. He has chosen to render it in the evening light. The setting sun is spreading a warm, yellow light which is reflected in the fjord. The grave mound and the birch are depicted against the light and are sharply outlined against the water, the mountain and the evening sky. The contemplative atmosphere is personified by two men — visitors or tourists — who are standing on the mound with their backs to the spectator of the painting.

The representation of specific subjects from Old Norse myth in nineteenth-century Norwegian art is relatively rare compared with the frequency with which historical subjects from Norway's past are represented. The Norwegian artist who most wholeheartedly dealt in mythological motifs was Peter Nicolai Arbo. After a short study period in Copenhagen he came to Düsseldorf at the beginning of the 1850s and spent some years there before settling down in Christiania in 1871. In his early work he concentrated on historical subjects, 'The Death of Håkon Jarl', 'The Embarkation of Olav Tryggvason in Norway' and 'The Death of Saint Olav at Stiklestad', all as illustrations in a magazine, then 'The Flight of King Sverre', a lively battle scene with horses and riders but without any attempt to give it a context in medieval cultural history. In 1865

Figure 6.2.3.3. Thomas Fearnley, *Slindebirken* ('The Slinde Birch'). 1839. NGM 00363.
© Photo: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

he painted a mythological subject, *Valkyria* ('Valkyrie'), a close-up in monumental size of a young woman riding at full gallop above the clouds bare-legged and on a snorting black horse. She is dressed in a helmet, a short coat of mail and a flying blue mantle. In one hand she carries a javelin, in the other a shield. But the salon art of Paris reveals itself in her fair and elegant figure, as far away from the severe female warrior of the Nordic past as can be imagined.

When the painting was shown at the Scandinavian art exhibition in Stockholm, it was praised by Arbo's compatriot Lorentz Dietrichson for the speed and dynamics he thought it radiated. But he was sceptical of the mythological subject. In the same way as Geijer did in 1817, Dietrichson declared that it could not be the purpose of art to create cult images for a religion that had died out more than eight hundred years ago. The safest course remained: to let the living reality, the life of the people, be the basis for history painting (Grandien 1987: 174). But Arbo continued. In 1872 he completed his most

Figure 6.2.3.4. Peter Nicolai Arbo, *Åsgårdsreijen* ('The Wild Hunt of Odin'), 1872. NGM 00258. © Photo: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

admired work, also in a large format, the painting *Åsgårdsreijen*, sometimes called 'The Wild Hunt of Odin' (Figure 6.2.3.4). It shows the wild hunt of Odin, with the tumultuous band of gods, who, on a dark stormy night, traverse the wind-harassed earth on foaming horses and in passing pull with them naked young women from the ground. This scene does not correspond very closely to any Old Norse source, and, particularly in the female figures, Arbo's Parisian influences reveal themselves.

One motif, which many artists worked on, was the myth of Volund (Völundr) the smith from *Völundarkviða* ('The Poem of Völundr') in the Poetic Edda, included in P. A. Munch's book *Nordens gamle Gude- og Hjeltesagn* ('Scandinavia's Old Divine and Heroic Myths'), which appeared for the first time in 1840 and became a frequent source of inspiration for artists and poets. In 1878 in Munich Marcus Grønvåld painted the subject of the king's daughter's visit to Volund, a piece of work that was lost during the Second World War. In the early 1870s Olav Rusti made a very expressive image, 'Volund the Smith', showing him lying naked, captured and injured. The body writhes in pain; he lifts his right hand in powerless despair. Knut Ljøgodt (2002: 49) observes that the image without its reference to Norse myth could just as well be interpreted as a scene from classical myth, for example the satyr Marsyas being flayed. In the upstretched arm there is also a similarity to the Laokoon-group, while the head, sinking down towards the wound, can lead one to thoughts of the Dying Gaul. Once more the classical and the Old Norse meet.

Other artists to depict scenes from Norse myth are Oscar Wergeland with the now lost 'Loki and Sigyn' (1879) and Hans Heyerdahl, with a scene of the Midgard Serpent holding a helpless woman between its monstrous teeth. Another of his works depicts the helmet-adorned valkyrie Brunhilde's wild race after two horses to Hel, where she is stopped at the gate by the Goddess of Death, while a third painting shows Gudrun and Brunhilde by the body of Sigurd Fafnesbane. The strict relationship of these subjects to the Norse mythological sources is rather tenuous.

In the 1890s Gerhard Munthe developed a decorative style that incorporated both impressions from national peasant art and new international movements like the Art Nouveau or Jugend style. His ambition was to represent the Old Norse world by means of the Jugend style's focus on decorative surfaces and a simplification of forms. He was also influenced by traditional Norwegian tapestries and other forms of weaving, and his own pictures, with their monumental traits and strong colours, showed themselves very well suited as patterns for new woven designs, modelled on his cartoons. Munthe's works often seem

Figure 6.2.3.5. Carpet tapestry. Motif 'Oden'. After a cartoon by Gerhard Munthe, *c*. 1907. Photograph courtesy of the Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo.

to be based on Norse myth, but are actually free pictorial fantasies, like one of his first creations, 'The Daughters of the Northern Light', subtitled *Friere* ('The Suitors'), based on a watercolour from 1897. Three polar bears approach the three daughters of the Northern Light as suitors. The young women are pale and slim, standing barefoot and dressed in thin garments that reach down to their feet. Their hair creates fire-red flames. They look tense and apprehensive at the sight of the three suitors, especially the middle woman, who is having her bare toes licked by the first suitor, in an unmistakably sexual hint. Other works by Munthe freely combine historical subjects and motifs from Norse mythology, like his 1903–08 representation of the sea-battle that took place *c*. 985 at Hjörungavágr in western Norway when Hákon jarl Sigurðarson and his son Eiríkr defeated a combined Danish-Wendish force. The image shows the participation in the battle of the god Thor, with his goats, a valkyrie in full battle dress and Odin's ravens flying above the water.

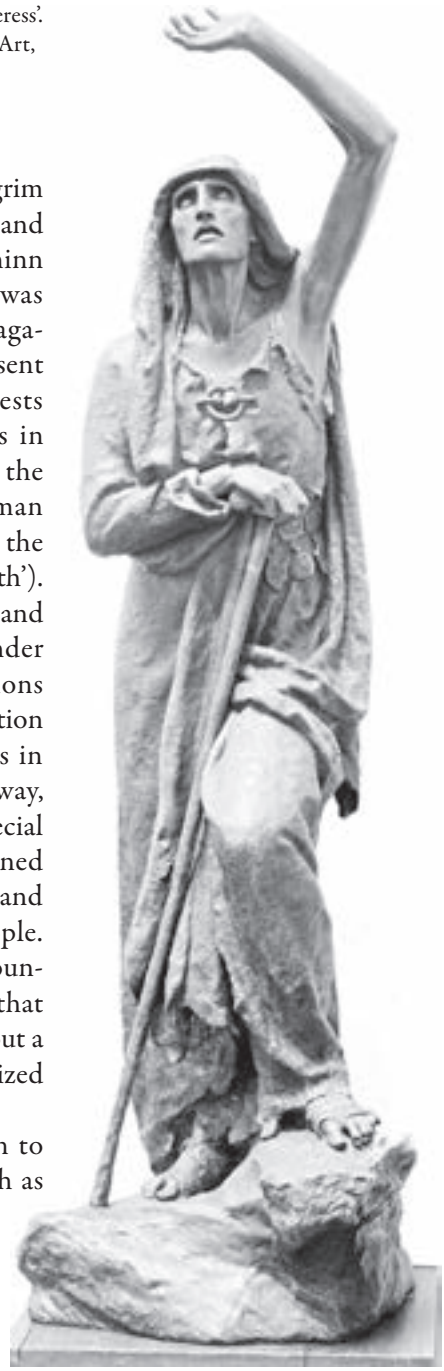

Figure 6.2.3.6. Søren Lexow-Hansen, 'Vala, the Norse Seeress'. 1886. NG. S. 00437. © Photo: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

Another tapestry, woven in 1908, shows a grim Odin riding on his eight-legged horse Sleipnir and followed by his two ravens Huginn and Muninn (Figure 6.2.3.5). This same image of Odin was depicted on the title page of the German magazine *Nordland*, whose objective was to represent Germany's economic and ideological interests in Scandinavia, and Scandinavian interests in Germany. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries German Romantic interest in Norway developed into the so-called *Nordsehnsucht* ('Longing for the North'). After Germany's victory over France in 1871 and the proclamation of the German nation under a reinstated Empire, pan-Germanic ambitions grew. Ideas emerged of a greater Germanic nation combined with all Germanic blood-relatives in a mighty union. Among these relatives, Norway, with its sublime natural environment, had a special status. German tourists on a visit there imagined themselves experiencing a feeling of kinship and a common fate with the country and its people. They travelled far into the fjords and the mountain valleys looking for a cultural narrative that told them not only about the past but also about a large and promising Germanic future, symbolized by the glittering mountain summits.

Emperor Wilhelm II was strongly drawn to this *Nordsehnsucht* and thought of the North as the original land of the Germans. That is the background to his ordering nine large and small tapestries based on Munthe's sketches for his hunting lodge Rominten — itself built on the basis of drawings by

the Norwegian architect Holm Hansen Munthe (Henningsen et al. 1997: 25). In 1913, a year before the outbreak of the First World War, Wilhelm had two pieces of sculpture based on the Frithiof saga erected by the Sognefjord, where he used to sail in his yacht Hohenzollern almost every summer between 1889 and 1903, often accompanied by the German fleet. The emperor showed his gratitude for the hospitality of the Norwegian people by the gifts of the Frithiof-statue in Vangses on one side of the fjord and the sculpture of King Bele in Balestrand on the other. These sculptures were created by German artists and have been the source of considerable political controversy over the years.

Norwegian sculptors would now and then base themselves on Old Norse subjects, including Stephan Sinding, a brother of the painter Otto Sinding, and Mathias Skeibrok, with a sculpture of 'Ragnar Lodbrok in the Snakepit'. Yet another sculptor, Søren Lexow-Hansen, worked with Scandinavian mythological motifs. His *Vala* (Figure 6.2.3.6), inspired by the prophetess of the eddic poem *Völuspá*, has been considered as one of the most outstanding works of Norwegian Realism of the 1880s. Fetched from the grave by Odin, emaciated and sinewy as a skeleton, she stands supporting herself with her right hand on a stick, her left arm raised towards the sky. That is also where her half-dimmed gaze from her deep eye-sockets is directed, thus towards those heights from where she gets her dim but gruesome prediction about the world's extinction at Ragnarok.

Most works of art with Old Norse subjects from the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century were based on historical events of the Viking Age and medieval periods rather than on Norse myth and the pre-Christian religions of the North. Famous battles fought by early Norwegian kings, like Óláfr Tryggvason at Svolder and Haraldr hárfagri at Hafrsfjord, were popular subjects, and to them was added the subject of the Norse discovery of America. A competition for the best painting on this subject was launched by a North American association before the World Fair in Chicago in 1893. The winning artist was Christian Krohg with the famous painting *Leiv Eriksson oppdager America* ('Leif Eriksson discovers America'). The choice aroused surprise and criticism (Ljøgodt 2002: 47), because Krohg, in contrast to the other competitors, was not a trained history painter but known as a painter of contemporary life and marine subjects. The realism makes the painting what it is: a seascape of the same type as other of Krohg's paintings of the lives of fishermen. The wind is fresh, the sea smoking and the wet decking of the ship, which is heeling hard in the wind that comes in from starboard, mirrors the hazy sky. Leif Eriksson, with the steering oar in a tight grip in his left hand, points with his right arm towards a light-green stretch of land which can dimly be seen on the hori-

Figure 6.2.3.7. Halfdan Egedius, *Seidmennene på Skratteskjær* ('The Sorcerers on Skratte Skerry'). 1899. NG. K & H. B. 03092.
© Photo: Anne Hansteen Jarre, The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

zon, while boat-men hurriedly come up on deck from the interior of the ship to see it with their own eyes.

As was the case in both Denmark and Sweden, Norwegian book illustrators made important use of motifs from Old Norse sources during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Again, however, historical subjects took precedence over strictly mythic or religious ones. The large illustrated translation of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (Storm 1899) contained illustrations by Halfdan Egedius, Christian Krohg, Gerhard Munthe, Eilif Peterssen, Erik Werenskiold and Wilhelm Wetlesen. It is a counterpart to Fredrik Sander's illustrated Edda-volume in Sweden, printed in 1893 with contributions from twenty-five artists. The Norwegian one has, however, a totally different ideological perspective. It functioned as a manifestation of the national consciousness that grew in strength during the last decades of the nineteenth century on account of conflicts about the union with Sweden, which ended with its dissolution in 1905. In Sweden, too, national feelings intensified during this period,

but people no longer looked for inspiration to the old Nordic past, but rather to what was considered to be genuinely Swedish.

The Norwegian kings' sagas were published in one deluxe edition and in one for popular consumption. The translation from Old Icelandic was made by the historian and Snorri-expert Gustav Storm, professor at the university in Christiania. He had also previewed the drawings in order to check their archaeological accuracy. The artists themselves had spent a great deal of time and effort on the commission. They studied the growing collections of items from the past in various museums, both within and outside Norway, and acquainted themselves with research into early Nordic culture that had been growing during the second part of the nineteenth century (Mjöberg 1967–68: II, 153–63). They also travelled around to those Norwegian counties which would form the background to the various scenes. One might expect that such extensive preparations would result in dryness and excessive indebtedness to antiquarian models, but this was not the case at all. The demands of Realism for truth to nature and power of expression in the figure characterization were still there, but were happily united with the influence of the Jugend style for simplicity and purity of form.

Christian Krohg made the drawing for the front fly-leaf of the Snorri-edition. It shows Snorri Sturluson himself — heavy, sullen, sturdy and corpulent — sitting in a chair with dragon arabesques, wearing a belt with a decorated buckle. On the wall hangs his shield. One of Krohg's other illustrations shows Gunhild, widow of Erik Blood-Axe, egging on her sons to fight and win Norway back from Hákon the Good. The most original and artistically the strongest image in the Snorri translation is the famous *Seidmennene på Skratteskjær* ('The Sorcerers on Skratte Skerry') (Figure 6.2.3.7), drawn by the young Halfdan Egedius. It shows four men on the point of drowning; only their heads are still sticking up above the water. The subject is taken from the saga of Olav Tryggvason (Óláfr Tryggvason). When the king's men recognized the leader of the sorcerers, Öyvind, Olav had him and all the others taken prisoner and brought out to a skerry over which the water rose when the tide came in. There they were bound. Then the tide came and slowly drowned them standing on the skerry, which was later called Skratteskjæret ('The Sorcerers' Skerry'). With strong simplification and at the same time a kind of grim comedy Egedius has depicted the four heads in the water and their facial expressions in the face of the death that awaits them.

As time passed Norse mythology and history came to be subjects of less and less interest to the visual arts. Some exceptions occurred in 1930 when Leon Aurdal and Als Rolfsen each separately took the subject of St Olav (King Óláfr Haraldsson, r. *c.* 1015–30) as a motif. Aurdal presented his large painting 'The

Battle at Stiklestad' in Trondheim, while Als Rolfsen had been asked to depict the saint's story in the choir of the church of Stiklestad. The reason why this motif was taken up once more was the celebration of the nine hundred years' memorial of the introduction of Christianity in Norway, with which King Olav was strongly associated. He had been killed in the battle of Stiklestad in 1030 and quickly acquired a martyr's glory; the cult that sprung up around him under the name of Olav the Holy is supposed to have strongly contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity in Norway.

Three years later, in 1933, Axel Revold painted a pure Norse mythological motif, the two large frescoes 'Völuspá I' and 'Völuspá II' in the university library in Oslo. Revold was the first artist in Norway to try the fresco technique on rough, unplastered walls, a technique that he used at the beginning of the 1920s for his decoration of the Stock Exchange in Bergen. This gave birth to the so-called fresco-period in Norwegian art, with himself, Per Krohg and Rolfsen as its first representatives; they called themselves 'The Fresco Brothers'. In the Völuspá frescoes Revold's cubist past expresses itself in straight, stiff forms, against which the gods' somewhat softer figures outline themselves. With straight backs, javelins in hands and in an antique way almost naked, only lightly draped in animal skins, they look more like young Olympic gods; here Classicism once more shines through the Old Norse. In 'Völuspá I', the foreground is to the left dominated by the three Norns Urd, Verdandi and Skuld at the base of the world-tree Yggdrasill, whose roots stretch down to the spring of water. In the angular foliage there is the eagle that will fly over the green Earth when, after Ragnarok, it rises for the second time from the sea.

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6.2.4 – Painting and Sculpture in Germany, *c.* 1750 to the Early Twentieth Century

Sarah Timme

The reception of the pre-Christian religions of the North and Norse mythology in the German visual arts has received little attention in research until now. There is only one survey of this topic, published in 1891 and concentrating on the afterlife of Norse mythology. The author, Paul Herrmanowski, begins his first chapter by stating that the artists have *sich … diesem Stoffe gegenüber bisher spröde verhalten* ('up to now been addressing this subject coyly') and gives two reasons for that: most artists would not even know about the *Grossartigkeit und Herrlichkeit dieses Heidentums* ('grandeur and magnificence of this heathendom'), and the few who do are afraid of not being understood by their audience. In this respect, the visual arts would differ from music where Richard Wagner's adaptation of Norse mythology in his *Ring of the Nibelungs* aroused immense interest (Herrmanowski 1891: 1). Hence, music could serve as a mediator and stimulate the use of mythological stories in the visual arts. This would, Herrmanowski hoped, oppose the growing influence of Realism — *eine ideale und echt nationale Aufgabe der deutschen Künstler* ('an ideal and at the same time truly national task for the German artists') (Herrmanowski 1891: 3).

Herrmanowski's introduction reveals several characteristics of the use of Norse mythology in German visual art: until *c.* 1850 relatively few works of art emerged, though in the second half of the nineteenth century Wagner's opera

Sarah Timme Sarah Timme is Research Associate in the Department for Scandinavian Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. She works on Norse mythology in the visual arts, Scandinavian visual arts and book illustration.

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tetralogy had an enormous impact on the usage of Norse myths in visual art, and many of the artworks can be connected to the expression of Nationalism and opposition to Modernism. The fact that little is known by most Germans about Norse mythology is probably also one reason why Herrmanowski's study is the only one on the subject until now; not only the artists but also most art historians do not know about it or, if they do, are afraid of not being understood by their audience. Certainly, the subject deserves a more thorough investigation in order to explain: first, why it did not attract more interest during the period of Romanticism, when in Sweden and Denmark Norse myths were arousing a lively interest: and, second, to analyse and contextualize the works that have emerged. There are more of these than are commonly supposed, most of them from the second part of the nineteenth century.

When researching the influence of the pre-Christian religions of the North on the visual arts, it is not only Norse mythology that is relevant, even though this will be the focus of the present chapter.[1] There are also, in the context of Christian iconography, images depicting the Christianization of the Germanic regions as well as visualizations of pre-Christian rites or monuments. Prior to the eighteenth century it is these latter subjects that receive attention in illustrated books concerning non-Christian cultures and religions (see Effinger et al. 2012; Kaufmann 1993). An early influential example from the seventeenth century is Philipp Clüver's *Germania antiqua* (1616), with etchings showing amongst others Germanic rites of burial and sacrifice (Kaufmann 1993: 14–68; see *Götterbilder* 2012: 195–96, and 197–201 for more examples from the eighteenth century).

In Christian iconography, pre-Christian religions appear primarily in the context of the *vita* of St Boniface, who conducted a Christian mission among Frisian and Germanic peoples during the eighth century. The earliest depictions are from the sixteenth century: an illumination in Wigand Gerstenberg's *Hessische Landeschronik* shows Boniface felling the oak of Donar (probably equivalent to the Norse god Þórr) (*c*. 1500, Murhardsche Bibliothek Kassel, MS Hass. 115 4°, fol. 37^{v}; cf. Schierz 2004b: 139–40, fig. in Schierz 2004a: 11). Other subjects are Boniface baptizing or preaching among the heathen as well as (sporadically) the saint destroying idols (cf. Kiesel 1973: cols 434–35).

[1] For this, the unpublished collection of images made by the Frankfurt research project 'Edda-Reception' (cf. <http://www.eddarezeption.de>) has been of invaluable help. Since 2005 the project has assembled data on as well as images of artworks referring to Norse mythology. Even if this collection is not exhaustive it can claim a certain representativeness that surpasses by far the information available in previously published literature.

Like most subjects from Norse mythology and pre-Christian religion, those concerning the life of St Boniface did not become established in the visual arts before the end of the eighteenth century (cf. Schierz 2004b: 12), when interest in the national past was growing, in the beginning aesthetically motivated, later on increasingly in national contexts.

These tendencies reached the German-speaking countries during the second half of the eighteenth century. They were first reflected in literature (cf. Chapter 5.1. above), then, towards the end of the eighteenth century also in the visual arts. The works were inspired by British and Danish works of art which emerged during the preceding decades (cf. Chapters 6.2.1, 6.2.2 and 6.2.5). The early British reception was primarily linked to the aesthetics of the sublime, which dissociated itself from Winckelmann's idea of Classicism that evolved at the same time. Instead of *edle Einfalt und stille Größe* ('noble simplicity and quiet grandeur') postulated by Winckelmann in his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauer-Kunst* ('Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture') (1755), the artists were fascinated by the obscure, terrible and uncanny. The interest in Norse mythology — at that time equated by many with Celtic mythology — was then stimulated by Ossianism.

These trends led the way to Romanticism, and it seems remarkable that the Romantic visual artists from the German-speaking countries were hardly occupied with Norse mythology at all — even though Johann Gottfried Herder supported the use of these myths in the visual arts in his programmatic article *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* ('Iduna, or the Apple of Rejuvenation') (1796):

> Wäre ich ein nordischer König, ich ließe mir, wie die Britten eine Galerie Shakespeare's und Miltons haben, eine Galerie der alten Geschichte meiner Völker malen, und untersagte meinen Künstlern die zu oft wiederholte [sic] Römergeschichten. (Herder 1998: 162)
>
> (If I were a Nordic king, I would have had a gallery of my people's old history painted, as the British have a gallery of Shakespeare and Milton, and forbidden my artists the stories of the Romans, which are too often repeated.)

Philipp Friedrich Hetsch's oil painting *Odin vor dem Höllenthor* ('Odin before the Gate of Hell') (*c.* 1803–07) is probably a direct reaction to the British preoccupation with Norse myth. The work decorated the New Palace in Stuttgart together with Hetsch's painting *Valkyries*. It possibly depends on the German translation of Thomas Gray's *Descent of Odin* (1761) by Ludwig Gotthard

Kosegarten, first published in 1800 (Kosegarten 1813), Gray's poem being a free translation of the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar*. The oil paintings are both lost today, but an oil sketch for *Odin vor dem Höllenthor* has survived (Figure 5.8.3 illustrating Chapter 5.8 above).

The subject Hetsch chooses in *Odin vor dem Höllenthor* was very popular in connection with the aesthetics of the sublime (see Chapters 4.3 and 5.8 above; cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 118–66; Timme 2013: 307–10). *Baldrs draumar* tells how the god Óðinn, calling himself Vegtamr, rides to Hel. There he raises a dead *völva*, anxious to know why his son Baldr was having *ballir draumar* ('evil dreams') (*NK* 277). Gray's adaptation inspired a whole range of British artists and writers. In Hetsch's work the dark scenery surrounded by rocks reflects the sublime, but the seeress, more resembling a nun, is not able to evoke sublime emotions either in Odin or his horse — or in the beholder. Accordingly, an anonymous traveller notices in his account of his Stuttgart visit (Anonymous 1807: 58) that Odin looks as if he is asking someone the way rather than performing an act of necromancy. This traveller's extensive discussion of the painting also criticises the fact that Odin has *von einem nordischen Halbgott* [*fast*] *gar nichts* ('almost no characteristics of a Nordic demi-god'; 56–57) and that he is *gegen das nordische Kostume [...] ganz nackt gebildet* ('contrary to Nordic costume [...] represented as totally naked'; 56).

These two works by Hetsch probably remain the only paintings of a Norse mythic subject by a German-speaking artist until the end of the 1820s.[2] Apart from these, the stories had simply not established themselves either in painting or in sculpture. Only in applied graphics (primarily book illustration) and the more private genre of drawing are further works with Norse subjects known from this period.

Accordingly, the first works to emerge in the course of the reawakened interest in pre-Christian religions and Norse mythology are graphics. However, it was not British fashions that turned the attention of German artists to these stories in the beginning, but rather Danish-German contacts. In the 1780s Daniel Chodowiecki illustrated Johannes Ewald's *Samtlige Skrifter* ('Collected

[2] There may be more, now-forgotten, works: An exhibition in Dresden in 1829 showed a picture entitled *Heimdal, der Wächter Walhallas, kündigt den Göttern ihren Untergang an* ('Heimdal, the Guardian of Walhalla, Announces Doom to the Gods') by J. Westphal (F. G. H. 1829: 242), on which I could not find any further information. And Jost Hermand (2001) claims to have found a painting entitled *Cäcilia Tschudi als Walküre* ('Cäcilia Tschudi as a Valkyrie') by Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld from 1813, but the dating as well as the iconography cannot be proven.

Works'). Among his etchings are also three printed in 1784 referring to Ewald's drama *Balders Død* (1773; cf. Engelmann 1997 [1857–60]: nos 502–04). Furthermore, Chodowiecki drew *Boniface Felling the Oak of Donar* (1780) and he worked as an engraver for Friedrich David Gräter's *Bragur: Litterarisches Magazin der Deutschen und Nordischen Vorzeit* ('Literary Magazine of German and Nordic Antiquity') (cf. Engelmann 1997 [1857–60]: no. 1833). Gräter promoted Old Norse literature in this and other magazines (on Gräter, see Radspieler 1968; Schwarz 1935).

It is significant that it was Gräter, a Swabian grammar school teacher not integrated into the art milieu of the time, who, around 1800, made the greatest effort to incorporate Norse mythology into German visual art. Already in 1792 he had treated this issue theoretically in his essay *Ideen über die Brauchbarkeit der Nordischen mythologie für die redenden und zeichnenden Künste* ('Ideas on the Usefulness of Norse Mythology for the Communicative and Graphic Arts') (more on this below). He was also the first to disseminate visual representations of Norse gods and goddesses in Germany: several artists published illustrations of Nordic subjects in his magazines.

One example is the copper engraving *Braga* (Figure 6.2.4.1), the frontispiece of *Barden-Almanach der Teutschen* ('Bard-Almanac of the Germans') published in 1802 by Gräter together with the writer Karl Ludwig August von Münchhausen. The engraving, the work of Münchhausen, visualizes the idea of a renovation of poetry through Norse mythology as it is also expressed in the texts of the *Barden-Almanach*. The graphic shows Bragi, the god of poetry (cf. *SnE* 2005: 25, ch. 26). The pictorial representation here does not depend primarily on the Old Norse sources but models Bragi on the Greek god Apollo: Apollo's lyre has been replaced by a Celtic harp, and oak leaves rather than a laurel wreath adorn Bragi's hair. Instead of pieces of antique architecture the god leans on a simple stele, the runic inscription 'Braga' on its pedestal also marking the god as Nordic. The archaizing features, *contrapposto* and idealized nudity were probably needed in order to identify the figure as mythological. The curly locks falling on the shoulders emanate directly from the iconography of Apollo. So, the artist models the Norse god on a classical one and simultaneously stresses his Nordic character. Another version of the illustration (Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, estate of Friedrich David Gräter, Cod. misc. fol. no. 31) shows the god neither in *contrapposto* stance nor draped with fabric, but wearing an animal skin. Here, the deviation from the Greek model was possibly too strong, and that may have been the reason that this draft was not used. It was generally a challenge for the artists to depict figures from Norse mythology as they could not draw on an iconographic tra-

Figure 6.2.4.1. Karl Ludwig August von Münchhausen, *Braga*, frontispiece to *Barden-Almanach der Teutschen, für 1802*, ed. by Friedrich David Gräter and others (Neu-Strelitz: Albanus, 1802).

Figure 6.2.4.2.
Albert Wagner or Peter Joseph Büttgen, *Freya*, 1824. Stuttgart Württembergische Landesbibliothek, estate of Friedrich David Gräter, Cod. misc. fol. 31. 1824. Reproduced with permission of Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart.

dition. The dependence on Greek mythology is a typical — more or less successful — solution to this problem.

In the following decades a whole range of Swedish and Danish artists were occupied with subjects from Norse mythology, but for Germany there is only a single failed project. The initiator was again Gräter, who had great ambitions to publish a *Prachtwerk über die nordische Götterlehre* ('splendid work on Norse mythology') (Gräter 1812: 21). Planning for this had already begun during the last decade of the eighteenth century and was possibly suggested by the Danish philologist Rasmus Nyerup (letter from Gräter to Nyerup, 6 March 1794, in Schwarz 1935: 16). In 1796 Herder argued for such a *kleine nordische Mythologie mit Kupferstichen* ('small Norse mythology in engravings') in his *Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung* (Herder 1998: 161). In 1807 Gräter published a booklet listing the subjects he envisaged for eight numbers of six leaves each

(Gräter 1807). The first number was scheduled for 1810 (Gräter 1809: 3). The project had received positive feedback in contemporary periodicals (e.g., Höck 1809) but nothing ever appeared in print.

Obviously, it was difficult to find artists willing to design the subjects Gräter had predetermined. In fact, he would have been able to engage some Stuttgart artists in his project (cf. Gräter 1809: 3–4), amongst others the above-mentioned Phillipp Friedrich Hetsch, but in 1812 he published *Aufruf an die Meister der bildenden Kunst* ('Call to the Masters of Fine Art') in which he invited every artist who wanted to *etwas Großes und Göttliches [...] schaffen* ('create [...] something grand and divine'; Gräter 1812: 34) to participate. It comes as no surprise that scarcely any artist wanted to transfer Gräter's descriptions of the subjects into images. The verbal descriptions show that he was not able to think himself into the specific conditions of creativity for visual art but approached the task from a literary perspective. For example, one sheet was supposed to show *Freya, als Göttin der ehelichen Treue und Zärtlichkeit, irrt in Einöden, und sucht weinend ihren Gemahl* ('Freya, as goddess of marital fidelity and tenderness, wandering in deserts and in tears searching for her husband') (Gräter 1807: [1]), a subject not representable visually without elucidating the tale it refers to.

However, Gräter pursued the project further, as a series of pencil drawings and lithographs in his estate prove. They were designed *nach [...] Graeter's Schriften* ('after Graeter's writings') by the Stuttgart artists Albert Wagner and Peter Joseph Büttgen in 1824 (Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart, estate of Friedrich David Gräter, Cod. misc. fol. 31, a). The estate contains sev-

Figure 6.2.4.3. Dietrich Wilhelm Lindau, drawing after Hermann Ernst Freund's Ragnarok frieze. 1826. By permission of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Ole Haupt.

enty-four sheets presenting the whole range of gods and goddesses from Norse mythology. Here, the figures are not shown in any narrative context; rather, the artists concentrated on bodily representation (Figure 6.2.4.2). All gods and goddesses are naked or merely covered by transparent fabric. Often the contour of the naked body is outlined repeatedly.

This concentration on the figure is characteristic of many works depicting Norse myths. It reveals the dominance of questions about how to represent the Norse gods. Should they be marked as Nordic, and how? In which way should they relate to the classical gods and goddesses? Many works remind one of sculpture, such as Münchhausen's *Braga*. These images were connected in form more to neoclassical aesthetics than to Romanticism, which ran contrary to such a restriction on bodily representation. Accordingly, the German Romantic writer Amalie von Helwig demanded in an article on Bengt Erland Fogelberg's drinking horn (see Chapter 6.2.2 and Fig. 6.2.2.4 there) that Norse myths should be used in painting rather than in sculpture, as she argued that it is more difficult to disengage oneself from classical ideals in sculpture (von Helwig 1822: 245).

There are very few examples from this period that develop an independent aesthetics rather than grapple helplessly with classical models. Interestingly, these tracks lead to Rome. In the first half of the nineteenth century Rome was still the centre of European art, and many artists from different countries met there. Among them was a group of Danish artists occupied with Norse mytho-

Figure 6.2.4.4. Franz Nadorp, *Nedhögr, der Menschenwürger* ('Nedhögr, the Human Strangler'). 1833. Photograph courtesy of Museum Georg Schäfer, Schweinfurt.

logy who probably introduced these subjects to some German artists. This is certainly the case with the German painter Dietrich Wilhelm Lindau, who made three drawings based on the gypsum sketch for Hermann Ernst Freund's Ragnarök frieze in 1826 (on this, see Chapter 6.2.1 above). The outline drawings document a successful adaptation of neoclassical models (Figure 6.2.4.3). Although the representation of the gods still depends on classical iconography, the frieze is, at the same time, highly dynamic. A good example of its dynamic quality is the figure of the god Heimdallr, who announces the end of the world with his horn. His sinuous body is naked, the horn and his line of vision point beyond the picture border. The world serpent winds in the opposite direction between the bodies of the women, whose emotional gestures indicate how touched they are by the coming end of the world. Lindau's drawings were soon exhibited in Rome, Munich and Dresden, implying a certain interest in the frieze. The drawings probably influenced Carl Heinrich Hermann's *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes in fünfzehn Bildern* ('History of the German People in Fifteen Pictures'), a collection of fifteen sheets of pictures from the 1840s, in which German history begins with Norse mythology (Oelwein 2010).

Another German artist living in Rome and sporadically dealing with Norse mythology is Franz Nadorp. In 1833 he drew the rather unusual subject *Nedhögr, der Menschenwürger* ('Nedhögr, the Human Strangler') (Figure 6.2.4.4). This work shows the influence of the aesthetics of the sublime in the style of Fuseli (Seeliger 2000: 128). Opposed to works depending on neoclassicism, Nadorp shows no interest in the single figure but in the chaos of the dead bodies intertwined with one another, contrasting with the powerful and agile dragon of death. How Nadorp arrived at this subject remains unclear. His interest in Norse myths is, like Fuseli's, connected with a general interest in exotic literary subjects, such as the *Nibelungenlied*, Ossian and Shakespeare (cf. Bijvoet 1976) and a *Vorliebe für [...] unheimliche Szenen* ('predilection ... for uncanny scenes') (Bijvoet 1976: 58). Nadorp knew the Dane Herrmann Wilhelm Bissen, who lived in Rome from 1824 to 1834 and created numerous works on Norse myths (cf. Bott et al. 1991: 484–85; Chapter 6.2.1 above). However, it cannot be proved that Bissen influenced Nadorp to create this subject.

The reason why adaptations of Norse myths in the context of Romantic aesthetics were so rare is probably that the German audience was not familiar with them. Thus the artists faced the initial difficulty that the subjects had to be introduced into the repertoire of the visual arts, whereas Romantic handling of mythological material concentrated on variation and renewal. It is exactly this difficulty that Gräter had already pointed out in his *Ideen über die Brauchbarkeit der Nordischen mythologie für die redenden und zeichnenden Künste* from 1792. He argued that the most important criteria for answering the question of whether Norse mythology could be used in the visual arts were, first, existing knowledge of the stories and, second, how beautiful they were. As the myths were not yet *allgemein und ganz gekannt* ('generally and completely known') (Gräter 1802: 88), visual art's task would be in the beginning to make them known, and this is something that Gräter devoted himself to in the decades following. At first, he argued, artists should not use them for the representation of their ideas but just show the myths themselves, without allegorical or symbolic content. However, it is precisely the representation of ideas that is of central interest to Romantic aesthetics. Indeed, Gräter's category of beauty points to his continuing adherence to neoclassical aesthetics. For Gräter, Old Norse and classical literature were equivalents (cf. Radspieler 1968: 52–54; Böldl forthcoming). It is probable, therefore, that he believed in the possibility of Norse mythology's incorporation into the repertoire of the fine arts.

Gräter's article is the first lengthy contribution to a debate that took place during the following decades primarily in Sweden and Denmark.[3] In the 1810s and 1820s several works appeared, discussing the controversial question of whether Norse myths could be used in the visual arts and commenting in the process on Gräter's article (see further Chapters 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 above). In turn, the Danish debate of the 1820s was followed in Germany: the most important contributions were translated into German and reviewed in well-established magazines (Baden 1822; Möller 1823; Anonymous 1825; Oelwein 2010: 126–27).[4] It is interesting that for the advocates as well as for the opponents of the usage of Norse myths neoclassical aesthetics remains the norm of the visual arts, as with Gräter, and that in the later contributions general knowledge of the myths and their beauty were still the most important criteria. Interestingly also, people who were not generally negative towards Norse myths argued against their usage in the visual arts. In Germany, this is the case with Jacob Grimm. Although in his 1821 review he criticizes the polemics against Norse mythology by the secretary of the Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Torkel Baden, he considers it unsuitable for representation in visual art:

> Odin, Thor und sämmtliche götter werden in keinem bilde den zuschauer mehr ergreifen; dem volk liegen sie so ferne als indische oder ägyptische, und gelehrsamkeit vermag sie ihm nicht zurückzuführen. (Grimm 1991: 157; cf. Böldl 2000: 40)
>
> (Odin, Thor and all the gods will not move the spectator more in any image; they are as distant from the people as Indian or Egyptian [gods] and erudition is not capable of leading them back.)

However, he also faces the neoclassical primacy of antiquity with doubt:

> es läszt sich kaum abläugnen, dasz die griechischen [Götter] näher liegen, doch in warme nähe treten sie auch nicht, ihre gefällige schöne form unterhält ein, wenn man so sagen kann, allgemein europäisches wohlgefallen. (ibid.)
>
> (It can hardly be denied that the Greek [gods] are closer, but they do not enter into a warm closeness either; their pleasingly beautiful form entertains a general European pleasure, so to say.)

[3] Before that, the Swiss philosopher Johann Georg Sulzer had rejected the usage of Norse mythology in visual art in his *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* ('General Theory of the Fine Arts') (Sulzer 1774: 794).

[4] The adaptation of Norse myths by Scandinavian artists was also noticed in Germany. In 1822 the *Kunstblatt* ('Arts Paper'), a supplement to *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* ('Morning Paper for the Educated Estates'), gave an account of the Copenhagen art competition (ΤΛ 1822) and reported on Bengt Erland Fogelberg's drinking horn (von Helwig 1822).

Grimm's argument articulates powerful reasons why Norse mythology did not establish itself in the visual arts of Romanticism in Germany. Aesthetic renewal took place in the nineteenth century rather in genres rooted in the present, as, for example, in landscape painting. Frank Büttner (2003: 561–62) has presented a similar argument concerning visualisations of the legend of the Nibelungen, which, however, in comparison to Norse mythology, has received substantially greater interest in Germany. Iconographically, these subjects were less problematic than mythological ones, as here no gods were to be depicted, and the artists could more easily free themselves from the dominant influence of neoclassicism. Instead, they drew on a style inspired by concepts of the Middle Ages and medieval art. The Nibelungen legend fitted well into the medieval revival that accompanied Romanticism and, at the same time, satisfied the need for national subjects. Even more successful was the use of Northern antiquity in landscape painting. In paintings by the north German Romantics, dolmens (prehistoric standing stones) quite often lend a Nordic character to the landscapes (e.g. Caspar David Friedrich's *Hünengrab im Schnee* ('Dolmen in Snow'), 1807; cf. Tittel 1997). It was easier to substitute runestones or megalithic graves for fragments of ancient Greek temples than to make classical gods Nordic.

Thus Norse myths were adopted as subjects only sporadically in German art and are to be found primarily illustrating smaller works in the media of the graphic arts. Indeed, book graphics is the genre in which most depictions of these stories appeared in the nineteenth century. After the 1820s many handbooks on Norse mythology were published, a number of them were illustrated. In the decades following, the number of book illustrations rose steadily. The reason for that is not only the growing interest in Norse mythology and religion from the 1830s onwards but also a general increase in book publication and reproductive graphics during the nineteenth century. However, book illustration will only be touched on briefly here, even though it is extremely important for the popular visualization of Norse mythology.

Public Uses of Norse Myths

In the 1830s the visual reception of Nordic pre-Christian religion and mythology begins to establish itself in another context: now the mythic narratives are more often used in comprehensive iconographic programmes decorating private or public buildings. This correlates with the fact that Norse mythology was more and more understood as Germanic, which made it possible to functionalize the stories in a German national political context, in contrast to the

aesthetic interest that predominated in earlier works. In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of works increased so greatly that the phenomenon, which remains largely unexplored apart from some case studies, can only be presented here by means of select examples.

The most prominent and at the same time one of the earliest examples is Leo von Klenze's *Walhalla* in Donaustauf near Regensburg (built 1830–47). Here *valhöll*, the domicile of the fallen warriors in Old Norse myth (cf. Traeger 1991 2005: 32–34, ch. 38–41), is reinterpreted as a hall of fame for commendable German-speaking individuals (on the naming, see Traeger 1991: 43–44). In the interior of the building, which imitates the style of an ancient Greek temple, busts and plaques commemorating German rulers, scientists, artists and clergymen are displayed. The caryatids in valkyrie shape show the identification of classical and Nordic motifs which is characteristic of the building's programme. In addition, the three pediments spanning the interior bear reliefs depicting eddic cosmology by Wilhelm Lindenschmit the Elder. They are meant to represent three phases of Germanic mythic history: *Schöpfung, Blütezeit and Weltuntergang* ('Creation, High Point and End of the World'), as the reliefs are entitled. These correspond to the Greek triad of Chaos — Chronos — Olympus, which the building is meant to embody on the outside (cf. *SnE* 2005: 79–81). In style the relief stands out against the neoclassicism of the architecture by means of arabesque forms. Apparently, this rather Romantic form was seen as appropriate to the Germanic subject (see Busch 1988 on the aesthetics of the arabesque).

A frieze between the two storeys of the interior shows the history of the Germans from their alleged immigration from the Caucasus up to their Christianization (Traeger 1991: 71). The felling of the oak of Donar is depicted in high relief by Johann Martin von Wagner with a length of about eighty-five metres. As *Walhalla* is meant to express the notion of a German cultural unity, the Germanic conversion here represents *die Idee der kulturellen Gemeinschaft in einem vorkonfessionellen Christentum* and *die Einheit der "teutschen Zunge" auf der religiösen Ebene* ('the idea of cultural community in a pre-confessional Christianity' and 'the unity of the "German tongue" in religion') (Traeger 1991: 199; see also Kirchhoff 2004: 242–44). In contrast to most nineteenth-century artworks showing St Boniface (Schierz 2004a; Eidam et al. 2004) the saint here is not part of an explicitly Catholic and anti-pagan iconographic programme (on the 'renaissance' of St Boniface in the nineteenth century, see Weichlein 2004 and Lenhart 1954).

However, this is the case with Philipp Veit's fresco *Einführung der Künste in Deutschland durch das Christentum* ('The Introduction of the Arts into

Figure 6.2.4.5. Philipp Veit, *Die Einführung der Künste in Deutschland durch das Christentum* ('The Introduction of the Arts in Germany by Christianity'). 1836. Frankfurt am Main, Städel. Photo: © Städel Museum — ARTOTHEK.

Germany by Christianity') (1836, Figure 6.2.4.5) reflecting the overcoming of paganism as a precondition for culture (Suhr 1991: 94–103, no. F5, 245–47). The personification of Religion dominates the centre of the painting; on her right the Christian arts are shown, on her left, the conversion by St Boniface. The saint in bishop's regalia is preaching, having put his left foot on the felled tree-trunk as a gesture of triumph. A shadowy pagan seeress moves to the right out of the picture; the blue of her garment corresponds to the blue of the illuminated angel next to Religion (Suhr 1991: 98). This symbolizes the religious conquest of paganism. In the field of the arts this has its equivalent in the shadowy bard in the foreground who holds a harp with broken strings. His lowered head expresses *Erschütterung und Verzweiflung* ('distress and despair') (Balke 1986: 124). Correspondingly, in the left part of the picture the personification of Music holds a portative organ, an instrument that is often played by angels in Christian iconography. The bard is here not understood as a renovator of poetry, as on the *Braga* illustration discussed above, but as *überwundener Vorgänger der 'Musik'* ('the vanquished predecessor of "Music"') (Suhr 1991: 98).

While the Nazarene Veit's fresco particularly emphasizes the medieval arts and by this means implies a strengthening of Catholicism (Balke 1986: 128), the murals at Kartlow Castle in West Pomerania (built 1855–58) reflect a Protestant view on the Germanic conversion, interpreting Luther as the fulfiller of Boniface's work (cf. Weichlein 2004: 229). The felling of the oak of Donar by St Boniface is integrated into an iconographic programme on the Reformation in

the so-called Luther Hall. Through a representation of the Norse goddess Saga, the programme is directly related to Norse mythology. This wall painting is a copy after Wilhelm von Kaulbach (Dräger 1996: 51–52), the original being part of Kaulbach's cycle of murals on the history of mankind at the Neues Museum in Berlin (1851–52/53, destroyed during the Second World War). There, the allegory of Legend (in German *Sage*) was placed above one of the doors in the stairwell's upper floor. The ravens Huginn and Muninn are apparently whispering legends into her ear (Menke-Schwinghammer 1994: 89–90). The counterparts above the other doors are the allegories of Poetry, Science and History.

The allegory of Legend is also shown on one of the murals at Hohenschwangau Castle designed in watercolour by Moritz von Schwind by order of the Bavarian crown prince Maximilian (later King Maximilian II). In the Berchta Room, named after Charlemagne's mother, a series of paintings completed in 1835 tells the legend of his birth. One of them shows Legend and a magician, flanking a stair with the inscription *Was voraus die Sterne künden, singt getreulich Sage nach* ('What the stars predict, Legend sings faithfully after them') (Arnold 2006: 86, fig. 30). The connection with Norse mythology is suggested by a drawing by Schwind that depicts Legend accompanied by two ravens identified as Odin's ravens Huginn and Muninn (cf. *Moritz von Schwind* 1996: no. 126). In addition, Schwind's *Legend* holds a harp, which we have already met above as a symbol of poetic inspiration. The castle harbours even more references to Old Norse literature: the Heldensaal (Hall of Heroes) is decorated with pictures referring to Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen's translation of *Þiðreks saga* (1836). One of them shows Wieland (Old Norse Völundr), who is also known from the Poetic Edda.

The Nibelung cycle in the Munich Residence by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld also includes a 'Saga' with a harp. This figure, together with *Mära* ('fairytale'), flanks the *Dichter des Nibelungenlieds* ('Poet of the Song of the Nibelungs') in the cycle's opening painting (*c.* 1831–35) (Nowald 1978: 31–32). In the Old Norse texts, Saga does not play an important role, but, interpreted as an allegory of (German) legend and tale (cf. Grimm 1844: 863), she could easily be used as a complement to or substitute for visual art's traditional allegories. Such an allegory would be understood even by viewers not familiar with Norse mythology and thus contribute to a 'Germanization' of the iconographic programmes. However, even artists such as Moritz von Schwind and Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who showed intense interest in German legend, have treated Old Norse myth only sporadically. One reason for this may be that Norse mythology established itself as part of German national culture only during the first half of the century.

Besides the above-mentioned *Legend*, the Neues Museum in Berlin (built 1843–55) also featured a cycle of paintings exclusively referring to Norse mythology, which decorated the so-called Nordischer Saal (Nordic Hall). The decoration of the museum's rooms reflects the collections presented there. Thus, the Nordic Hall, harbouring the 'collection of Northern antiquities', has been painted with murals showing subjects from Norse mythology. The paintings were executed in the years 1850–52 in stereochrome technique by Gustav Heidenreich, Robert Müller and Gustav Richter based on an iconographic draft by Müller and Kaulbach (Heinecke 2011: 232–33).

These wall paintings offer an overview of the world system of Norse mythology: on the west wall four pictures focus on the gods' world: Odin and Hertha, Balder and Holda, Fro and Freya as well as the valkyries and Tyr, while the dominant theme of the east wall is the so-called low mythology and its influence on humanity — the myths here being understood as a personification of natural phenomena (Elves and Thor, Giants and Mermaids, The Norns, Hel and Loki). At the same time, the close connection between these worlds is stressed. So, the god Thor is shown as master of the elves on the east wall (see Heinecke 2011: 257–58 for more details on the interaction of the pictures). On the northern wall is a painted frieze showing Valhalla, Allfather and the Road to Hel. As the inclusion of (supposedly) genuine Germanic gods like Hertha or Holda already suggests, the creators of the iconographic programme referred in many details to Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835, English translation by J. S. Stallybrass based on the 2nd rev. edn. [1844] in 1882–83) (cf. Heinecke 2011: 235–36). There the creators could also find the interpretation of myths as natural phenomena, which was a widespread idea at that time.[5]

But the clue to the overall concept lies in the central representation of Allfather on the northern wall (Figure 6.2.4.6). Allfather is here not understood as Odin but is identified with *inn ríki* ('the mighty one') who, according to *Völuspá* 65 (*NK* 15), appears after Ragnarök. His hands rest on two runic tablets held by attendant figures also mentioned in *Völuspá* 60 (*NK* 14). In the painting, the tablets carry the inscriptions *Friede* ('peace') and *Heil* ('hail') in runes (Heinecke 2011: 242, 258). Allfather is flanked by representations of Valhalla and Hel. He himself reminds one iconographically of the Christian God with his long white beard and arms outstretched in a gesture of blessing. Hence the frieze's central theme is possibly the overcoming of pagan conceptions of the afterlife (Valhalla and Hel) by Christianity (Heinecke 2011: 258–60). If

[5] It is possible that, in addition to Müller and Kaulbach, other people, perhaps even Grimm himself, were involved (Heinecke 2011: 255–57).

Figure 6.2.4.6. Gustav Richter, 'Allfather'. *c.* 1850–52. Berlin Neues Museum.
© Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Photo: Claudia Plamp.

so, the cycle would fit well into the overall concept of the museum, which is, as Heinecke has shown, based on a Christian conception of history (Heinecke 2011: 13–14, 304–20). Nordic prehistory is thus integrated into a Christian history of mankind. Iconographically, not only loans from Christian models are found but also from classical mythology. For instance, Balder clearly resembles Apollo (Heinecke 2011: 254). This can possibly be understood in the context of a comprehensive Christian world-view, which comprises Norse as well as classical mythology. Yet, such analogies were widespread, as established iconographic traditions for depicting Norse myths were not available. Where it was easily possible, the figures are equipped with Nordic accessories: Odin, for example, wears a winged helmet and Freya an arm ring. The shields also correspond to Nordic models (Heinecke 2011: 254). By this means, a relationship was established with the objects exhibited in the Nordic hall.

At the same time the sculptor Wilhelm Engelhard worked on the design for an Edda frieze. Like some artists before him, Engelhard had been drawn to subjects from Norse mythology through contacts with Denmark. In the years 1839 and 1840 he was a pupil of Thorvaldsen in Copenhagen where he also met Hermann Ernst Freund, whose Ragnarök frieze stimulated his work on an Edda frieze (Grohn 1990: 331). The first sketches emerged there or shortly afterwards in Munich (cf. letter from Roland Engelhard to Herzog Ernst August zur Braunschweig und Lüneburg, 24 August 1951: 1^{r}, Grohn 1990: 329), where he was a pupil of Ludwig von Schwanthaler, known for the design for the valkyrie caryatids in the Walhalla (Traeger 1991: 15), from 1841 to 1847 (Grohn 1990: 327). Over the course of his life Engelhard dealt with Norse myths and was one of the most productive sculptors in this field.

Figure 6.2.4.7. Wilhelm Engelhard, Edda frieze, destroyed. *c.* 1860.
Figure from Engelhardt n.d.: pl. 13/14.

Figure 6.2.4.8. Wilhelm Engelhard, Edda frieze, destroyed. *c.* 1860.
Figure from Engelhardt n.d.: pl. 15/16.

In 1851 Engelhard showed outline drawings for the frieze at the World Exhibition in London, and in 1859 he began the execution in gypsum. In 1862 King Georg V of Hannover ordered the frieze for his neo-Gothic Marienburg castle near Hannover. There it was installed *probeweise in einem runden Saal [...] in Gips* ('on a trial basis in a round hall [...] in gypsum'), but was removed probably in 1866 due to the bad lighting (letter from Engelhard 1951: 1^{r}). The king then intended to use the frieze for the Welf castle in Hannover (built 1857–66). However, he lost the throne in the same year and the work was held up. The castle first stood empty, and when the Hannover Institute of Technology moved in in 1879, the gypsum model was installed there (Herrmanowski 1891: 8). It probably burnt during the Second World War (letter from Engelhard 1951: 1^{v}). Thus, the frieze is today only preserved in photographs. A series showing the whole work was published presumably in 1868 (cf. Hermann 1878: 335) in a portfolio (Engelhardt n.d.).

The frieze starts with the goddess Saga, but its main characters are the Einherjar, the fallen heroes, who come to Valhalla and finally fight alongside the gods at Ragnarök (*SnE* 2005: 32–34, 50, chs 38–41, 51). The iconographic programme shows certain similarities to the one at the Neues Museum, as the

last part of the frieze seems to indicate the theme of Christianization. After Heimdallr has announced the advent of Ragnarök by blowing Gjallarhorn, Odin and Thor fight against Fenrir and the Midgard Serpent (Figure 6.2.4.7). The composition is remarkable: the gods are shown moving forward and downward (in this, the coming fall may already be implied). This movement is intercepted by the widely opened mouths of the two monsters — Odin and, even more, Thor seem to fall plump into their mouths. So the futility of the fight is already indicated. From the right, three giants are facing the gods. They are presented as considerably more stable and solid than the gods themselves. The arm of the third giant establishes a connection to the next field of the frieze showing four more giants armed with blocks of stone (Figure 6.2.4.8). Then, clearly separated by a mighty rock, the fire giant Surtr appears with outstretched arms mounted on his horse. He wears a helmet surrounded by flames and holds a fire sword in his right hand, in his left a shield.

This representation of Ragnarök does not seem to side with the Norse gods. Rather the composition stresses their imminent fall, and the giants — like the gods of ideal physique — are facing them strongly and confidently. With their wild hair and beards and their archaic armament with clubs and stone blocks, the giants still have some 'barbarian' traits, whereas Surtr's appearance arouses rather positive associations. It is not only his trimmed beard that supports this impression: his outstretched arms remind one of a blessing gesture, the helmet surrounded by flames of a gloriole. Whereas Surtr can be understood as a personification of fire's destructive force in the Old Norse texts (cf. *SnE* 2005: 50–51, ch. 51), Engelhard seems to reinterpret the figure's light symbolism positively. As a fire-bringer Surtr can be associated with Prometheus, who has been compared with Christ (cf. Theisohn 2011). The flame sword is also an attribute of the archangel Michael (e.g., on Rubens's *Great Last Judgement* (1617, Alte Pinakothek, Munich)), who defeated Lucifer (Rev. 12. 7–12). During the nineteenth century, some mythologists claimed that the cult of Odin in Germany has partly been substituted by the cult of St Michael (cf. Simrock 1855: 275–76). An iconographic model may have been the representation of Surtr on the second plate of Hermann's *Geschichte des deutschen Volkes in fünfzehn Bildern*. The giant there, equipped with gloriole and wings, also resembles an angel (cf. Oelwein 2010: 138). The artists may possibly refer to Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*:

> [...] Surtr [erscheint] zwar als widersacher der Asen, doch wird er nicht unedel geschildert: er ist ein die welt reinigender gott, nach ihm beginnen neue, selige zeiten. (Grimm 1835: 469)

> (though Surtr [appears] as an opponent of the Æsir, he is not described as ignoble: he is a god purging the world, [and] after him new blessed times begin.)

Grimm even identifies Surtr with the *mátcari* ('mightier one') (*NK* 295), who, according to the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* (st. 43), will appear after Ragnarök (Grimm 1835: 471).

The frieze ends with a representation of the three Norns, who are interpreted as an allegory of the past, the present and the future. The face of the personification of the future is partly veiled, and she holds an urn on her lap that contains *die Loose der Menschen* ('the lots of humans') (Engelhard 1850: 7). Thus there seems to be a future after Ragnarök even if it is as yet uncertain. The cruciform position of the Norn in the middle can possibly be understood as a reference to Christianity (cf. Herrmanowski 1891: 11). That the frieze aims at Christianity is supported by Engelhard's description of it (1850: 7–8):[6]

> Diese Idee von Ragnarökr, bezog sich aber nicht auf die Welt an sich, sondern nur auf die Anschauungsweise der Skandinavier über das Leben des Alls. Wenn also von dem Untergange der Götter und der Welt die Rede ist, so kann ja nur gemeint sein, die Zerstörung der Formen des heidnischen Bewußtseins der alten Nordbewohner. [...] Mit Ragnarökr wäre also der Eintritt der christlichen Zeit gemeint.
>
> (This idea of Ragnarökr, however, referred not to the world per se but only to the Scandinavians' view about the life of the All. So, when the subject is the downfall of the gods and the world, only the destruction of the pagan consciousness of the old inhabitants of the North can be meant. Ragnarökr would thus indicate the advent of the Christian era.)

During the 1870s, parts of Engelhard's frieze were replicated in sandstone on the facade of the Tiele-Winkler Palace in Berlin, which displays even more sculptural decoration with subjects from Norse mythology (Kuhn 2014; Herrmanowski 1891: 8–12). The frieze's compositions became more widely known through illustrations based on Engelhard's designs, which appeared in a retelling of Norse myths by Wilhelm Wägner entitled *Unsere Vorzeit* ('Our Prehistory') (1874; cf. Herrmanowski 1891: 47), one of numerous illustrated books published at that time. One of Engelhard's other works depicting Norse myth is the more than life-size limestone sculpture of *Wotan* (1888), which was reinstalled behind the Lower Saxony State Museum in Hannover in 1987 (see Grohn 1990).

[6] A similar interpretation of Norse mythology can be found in Fritz Röber's cycle *Der Untergang der nordischen Götterwelt und das Erscheinen des Christentums* ('The Downfall of the Norse Gods and the Appearance of Christianity') for the Von der Heydt Castle in Bad Godesberg (cf. Anonymous 1894).

The theme of the first part of Engelhard's frieze, the admittance of the fallen warriors to Valhalla, accompanied by valkyries, was rather popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. This theme was possibly stimulated by the Walhalla in Donaustauf and, additionally, the subject fits well with political national history painting. For example, Robert Haertel's (1831–1894) gypsum frieze *Hermannsschlacht* ('The Battle of the Teutoburg Forest') (1863, Großherzogliches Museum Weimar, today destroyed) ends with the admittance of the fallen heroes to Valhalla (Köhler 1997: 59). The frieze gave a national character to the museum's art collection, which was mainly committed to neoclassical aesthetics. It can be understood as *politisches Bekenntnis des [auftraggebenden] Hauses Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach zu einem vereinigten Deutschland unter Preußens Führung* ('political avowal of the [commissioning] house of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach to a united Germany under Prussian guidance') (Krügel 2010: 368–69, cf. Köhler 1997: 59).[7]

The political impact becomes more explicit by the end of the century in some works that refer retrospectively to the formation of the German Empire in 1871. This is the case for a series of murals in the so-called Ruhmeshalle (Hall of Fame) in the Berlin Zeughaus. The baroque arsenal had been refurbished in 1877–91 according to the plans of the architect Friedrich Hitzig, and in the course of this refurbishment the Hall of Fame was set up in order to honour the Prussian army and decorated with wall paintings (cf. Arndt 1985: 54–84). The western wall of the Herrscherhalle (Hall of Sovereigns), the central dome hall, shows Geselschap's *Aufnahme der Gefallenen nach Walhalla* ('Admittance of the Slain to Valhalla') (completed in 1890, destroyed in 1945; Figure 6.2.4.9). The painting's foreground is dominated by winged valkyries bearing fallen warriors, among others Wilhelm I and Friedrich III (Arndt 1985: 68–69).

Here, the interpretation of Valhalla as an otherworldly hall of fame is inspired by the Walhalla in Donaustauf. Only the valkyries (indirectly) derive from the Old Norse sources, but, draped in long robes, they are not marked as specifically 'Germanic'. So, only catchwords from Norse mythology are used, and they are completely subordinated to a Prussian conception of history (to the overall concept of the Hall of Fame; cf. Arndt 1985: 113–19). Iconographically the painting is modelled on depictions of the Last Judgement (Arndt 1985: 69–70). In this respect it fits well within the tradition of Western art history. As in the case of Saga (see above), the reason why the subject of

[7] On the battle of the Teutoburg forest and its reception, see, among others, Kenzler 2009; Baltrusch et al. 2012.

Figure 6.2.4.9. Friedrich Geselschap, *Aufnahme der Gefallenene nach Walhalla* ('Admittance of the Slain to Valhalla'). Formerly Berlin Zeughaus, Hall of Fame. *c.* 1887–90. Photo: Peter Cürlis © Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte (Farbdiaarchiv).

Figure 6.2.4.10. Hans Makart, *Walküre und sterbender Held* ('Valkyrie and Dying Hero'). *c.* 1875–80. Nationalmuseum Stockholm. Photo: National Museum.

the Einherjar and the valkyries was so popular was apparently that it could be adapted detached from its precise mythological background. Thus, an integration into iconographic programmes with German national themes was easily possible.

The popularity of this motif of reception by valkyries is also attested by two more paintings showing the heroes of German unification being received by valkyries after death: Wilhelm Trübner's *Kaiser Wilhelm I. auf dem Schlachtfeld von Walküren begrüßt* ('Emperor Wilhelm I on the Battlefield Welcomed by Valkyries), 1897 (fig. in *Nibelungen* 1987, 198) and Alexander Zick's *Germanias letzter Gruß* ('Germania's Last Farewell'), 1898–99 (Kenzler 2009: no. 297)). Valkyries also occur on some sculptural monuments in public spaces that were popular during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Thus, for example, the Bismarck Monument near Bad Harzburg, the so-called Canossa Column (unveiled in 1877) was in the years from 1883 to 1930 flanked by two larger-than-life winged valkyries by Wilhelm Engelhard (Dormeier 1990: 237).

The Austrian history painter Hans Makart painted a large-scaled *Walküre und sterbender Held* ('Valkyrie and Dying Hero') (Figure 6.2.4.10). Makart's interest in subjects from Norse mythology had been stimulated, as was the case for many other artists, by Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* (first performed as a cycle in 1876), whose impact on the prominence and reception of these subjects can hardly be overestimated (see further Chapter 4.1 in Volume II). In contrast to many artworks dependent on Wagner, Makart's painting reveals a primarily aesthetic interest in Wagner's work (cf. Lovecky 2011: 186–89, 194; on Makart and Wagner, see also Steiner-Strauss 2011: 100–02). So, *Valkyrie and Dying Hero* resembles rather an emotional love scene than a political statement.

Far more historicizing are Carl Emil Doepler's costume designs for the premiere of the *Ring* (apparently Wagner for a short time also thought about commissioning Makart for the stage design, cf. Lovecky 2011: 183). These costumes, especially the armed valkyries with winged helmets, had an enormous influence on the way Germanic peoples were depicted in the visual arts (on Doepler's costume designs, see Zeh 1973: 22–29; Anderlik 1991). The watercolours were published in 1889 in a portfolio. There, the preface puts the costume designs into a political context:

> Um die Herrschaft der klassischen Mythologieen [sic] ist's geschehn und im Jubel über das geeinte Deutschland, über diesen endlich in Erfüllung gegangenen Völkertraum schlägt das junge Reich die holden Götter Griechenlands und Latiums in die Flucht, um den markigen, aus Edda und Skalda in die altdeutsche Literatur getragenen Gestalten in der auferstandenen Kaiserpracht Heimathsrecht zu verschaffen. (Clara Steinitz, in Doepler 1889: [1])

> (The reign of classical mythology has come to an end and in exultation about the unified Germany, about this national dream finally come true, the young Empire puts to rout the fair gods of Greece and Latium in order to give the right of residence under the resurrected glory of the Emperor to the pithy figures that have been integrated into Old German literature from Edda and Skalda.)

This identification of art and politics was widespread in the German reception of Wagner's work (Hanisch 1986: 631–35) and testifies to the intensification in the exploitation of Norse mythology in conservative national contexts.

But even before the premiere of the *Ring*-cycle in 1876 pictorial adaptations emerged. In 1869, for instance, Eduard Ille painted a cycle in tempera for Berg Castle at Lake Starnberg commissioned by Wagner's admirer Ludwig II of Bavaria (see Herrmanowski 1891: 191–96; Bauer 1987: 165–66). One of the numerous artists whose interest in Norse mythology was decisively stimulated by Wagner is Hans Thoma, who dealt with these subjects from the 1870s onwards (e.g. *Wotan and Brunhilde*, 1876). Thoma's work is also an example of their increasing popularization. On postcards, calendars and other objects his pictures spread into German homes, something recently illustrated in the exhibition *Hans Thoma: 'Lieblingsmaler des deutschen Volkes'* ('Hans Thoma: Favourite Painter of the German People') (Frankfurt 2013, see also Santorius 2013: 34–37). An even wider dissemination was achieved by trade cards that towards the end of the century were enclosed with products like chocolate or meat extracts.[8]

Another Wagner adherent was Hermann Hendrich, who visualized the interpretation of Norse myths as natural phenomena in numerous oil paintings. Here, figures from Norse mythology merge with the landscape (cf. Roth 2011; on Hendrich, see Schnall 2003: 729–31; Rohling 2001). In an entirely different context, Emperor Wilhelm II drew on such interpretations of myth. He commissioned Hermann Prell to paint a cycle of murals for the throne room of the German embassy in Rome, at that time (1894–99) housed in Palazzo Caffarelli. This was *Jahresmythos der Erde* ('The Seasonal Myth of the Earth') (figs. in *Herrmann Prells Wandgemälde*, 1899). In four pictures the course of the year is visualized, personified through the myths of Freyr and Gerðr as well as Baldr's death (cf. Fischer 1998: 57). The purpose of the cycle was to depict a German and at the same time a universal theme — the topic of the seasons would be understood by the Italian beholder as well (Fischer 1998: 52–54).

[8] For example, the series *Deutsche Mythologie* ('German Mythology') distributed by the chocolate manufacturer Petzold & Aulhorn (Zernack 2009: 333–48).

Figure 6.2.4.11. Franz Stassen, *Götterdämmerung* ('Twilight of the Gods'). 1921–24. Photograph courtesy of Altenburg Lindenau Museum.

In 1919 the palazzo was torn down. The paintings were saved but burned eventually in 1945, stored in the basement of the Foreign Office in Berlin.

Hermann Hendrich was also a member of the society *Edda: Verein für Nordisch-Germanische Kunst* ('Edda: Association for Nordic-Germanic Art') founded probably in the 1890s in Berlin (Parr 2000: 50). The association was dedicated to German national art in opposition to Modernism, aiming at *eine Wiedergeburt deutscher Kunst und deutschen Kunstgewerbes in nationalem*

Figure 6.2.4.12. Fidus, 'Loki, Wodan and Balder', illustration to Eduard Stucken's *Götterdämmerung*, in Eduard Stucken, *Balladen* (Berlin: Fischer, 1898), 193.

Sinne ('a national rebirth of German art and German applied arts'), according to the title of an article by Paul Hildebrandt in the association's publication of 1895. The association wanted to counter the incipient Modernism inspired from abroad, the *Landschaften in unmöglichen Farben und [...] Menschen in unmöglichen Stellungen* ('landscapes in outrageous colours and [...] people in outrageous postures') (Hildebrandt 1895: 9). By contrast, it extolled *das feste Anschliessen an die heimische Natur, an die vaterländische Sage und Geschichte* ('the solid affiliation to local nature, to national legend and history') (Hildebrandt 1895: 10). However, the society apparently aroused no greater interest; the above-mentioned publication is the only proof of its activity.

Broader attention was attracted to the Werdandi-Bund founded by Friedrich Seeßelberg in 1907. This association was named after the Norn Verðandi, and Hendrich was also a member (Parr 2000: 329). Werdandi-Bund was dedicated to the renewal of Germanness through national art, but it incorporated modernistic elements as well (Parr 1996: 316–18; Parr 2000: 153–54). Seeßelberg's universal aesthetics aimed at a unification of the (German) arts with religion,

philosophy and the natural sciences (Parr 2000: 55–60). Norse myths were also used for this purpose (e.g., in a performance of so-called 'living pictures' inspired by the Poetic Edda; cf. Parr 2000: 85–86, 441). Werdandi-Bund is one example of the continuity of German national views on Norse myths between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and simultaneously shows the integration of modernistic ideas, which Parr characterizes as an *altmodische Modernität* ('old-fashioned modernity') (Parr 2000: 159).

The same can be said about the artists who bring subjects from Norse mythology into the twentieth century (cf. Schuster 1999, 2001; Schuster and Ulbricht 2002). Besides Hendrich, the painter and graphic artist Franz Stassen was also a member of Werdandi-Bund (Parr 2000: 344–45). Stassen's huge interest in Norse mythology is also stimulated by an intense preoccupation with Wagner's work (on Stassen's reception of eddic literature cf. Timme 2016: 85–144). His oil painting *Götterdämmerung* ('Twilight of the Gods') (Figure 6.2.4.11) is the third picture in his seven-part cycle *Weltenwerdens Walterin* ('Governess of the World's Becoming') (Merk 1999: ch. '1908–1930: Bayreuther Kreis'). In its lower part Wotan's red head appears out of flames. From his forehead emanates a ray of light that, in the picture's upper part, leads into a multi-radiant gloriole which surrounds a white-shining embracing couple. These two figures are interpreted as Siegfried and Brünnhilde; the reference to Wagner's opera *Götterdämmerung* ('Twilight of the Gods') is made by the Redemption *leitmotif* from the opera depicted on the frame (cf. Merk 1999). The picture bears witness to Stassen's interest in esoteric light symbolism as it is also found in the work of Ludwig Fahrenkrog. The writer and painter Fahrenkrog founded the Germanische Glaubens-Gemeinschaft 'Germanic Faith Community' and used Norse myths extensively in his work. The visual artist Hugo Höppener, called Fidus, was also a member, and was preoccupied with Norse myth and esotericism as well. In his graphics he was — just like Stassen — strongly influenced by Jugend style (Figure 6.2.4.12).[9]

These artists are good examples of the use of Norse mythology in the context of an ambivalent 'anti-modern Modernism'. The contexts of *völkisch* movement, neopaganism and Lebensreform, in which the interest in Norse myth of the above-mentioned artists is located, are critical of Modernism (on Modernism in literature, see Chapter 6.1.1 in Volume II) and contain at the

[9] Even though these three artists, Stassen, Fahrenkrog and Fidus, are often mentioned in the same breath, based on stylistic and thematic connections, there are, nevertheless, also great differences between their works (cf. Schuster 2001: 260). Although they were active in similar milieux, personal contacts can only be proved in part and sporadically.

same time impulses of renewal (as is illustrated by the expressions *neo*paganism, Lebens*reform*) (Klinger 1995). In form the works of these artists also show elements of aesthetic Modernism, for example the flatness of the graphics influenced by Jugend style (which also may be inspired by medieval art). Nevertheless, these artists probably understood their practice as 'an ideal and at the same time truly national task' as Herrmanowski had demanded. Their work also shows that the nineteenth century's ideas of a national 'Germanic' myth live on into the twentieth century, when they are connected to National socialist ideology. The climax of the usage of Norse mythology and pre-Christian religions in German visual art can be located in the 1920s. The days of prestigious commissioned works were then already gone. The preoccupation with Norse mythology and pre-Christian religion, as in first decades of the nineteenth century, was again either the artist's personal affair or manifested itself in popular media like book illustration, postcards and trade cards.

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6.2.5 – The Visual Arts in Britain

Margaret Clunies Ross

The Pre-Romantic Reception of Old Norse Myth

The reception of Old Norse myth among British artists was inspired initially by the English poet Thomas Gray's translations of two Old Norse poems, 'The Descent of Odin: An Ode (From the Norse Tongue)', being a version of the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar* ('The Dreams of Baldr'), and 'The Fatal Sisters: An Ode', a version of the poem *Darraðarljóð* ('The Song of Darrǫðr'), a poem recorded only in manuscripts of *Njáls saga*. Gray probably composed these two poems in about 1761, but they were not published until 1768. They belong to a period of Gray's life when he was collecting material for a history of English poetry, while at the same time reading voraciously in related early literature, especially the Norse and Celtic (Clunies Ross 1998: 106–07). He knew *Baldrs draumar* from Bartholin's text and Latin translation (1689) and also from Mallet's *Histoire de Dannemark* (1755–56, 2nd edn 1763), while his knowledge of *Darraðarljóð* came from Torfaeus's *Orcades* (1697) and also from Bartholin.

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

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With this scholarly grounding in what was then available of Old Norse literature and history to educated readers outside Scandinavia, Gray combined an enthusiasm for the new aesthetic of the sublime (see Chapter 4.3). He had read Macpherson's Ossian poetry, first published in 1760, and the entries in his three-volume Commonplace Book (in the library of Pembroke College Cambridge) for the 1750s and 60s reveal a taste both for the antiquarian and the exotic, which found expression in his Norse odes as well as his Celtic-inspired poems like *The Bard*.

Gray's translations from Old Norse were admired and imitated by many members of the British intelligentsia during the later eighteenth century, as is evident from the contemporary periodical literature (Collins 1998). The translations also went through a number of editions between 1768 and 1800. Several visual artists were moved to illustrate Gray's Norse odes, as well as some of his other poetry, sometimes independently, sometimes as illustrations to new editions of the poems (for one of these, see Chapter 5.8, Figure 5.8.2). Chief among these artists were George Romney (1734–1802), Henry Fuseli (1741–1825) and William Blake (1757–1827). In each case the artists were inspired to create visual images based on Gray's vivid and often grotesque word-pictures set within a verse-form that maintained a more or less classical control of the poem's subject matter. That same combination of wildness and decorum is perceptible in each of the three artists' works and is a characteristic of the pre-Romantic reception of Old Norse myth in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first decade or so of the nineteenth. Although few later nineteenth-century painters appear to have taken themes from Norse mythology as their subjects, the influence of Blake and Fuseli, in particular, was long lasting on nineteenth-century artists who sought to represent the medieval sublime. However, Romney's sketches and cartoons based on works of literature were not well known and in many cases were rarely exhibited before the twenty-first century.[1]

Henry Fuseli (born Johann Heinrich Füssli in Zürich) was an artist inspired by both medieval and modern European literature and by the classical sculpture he saw at close hand during his eight-year stay in Rome from 1770 to 1778, where he became acquainted with several Scandinavian and English artists and sculptors, including Johan Tobias Sergel, Nicolai Abildgaard, George Romney

[1] This situation has been remedied in recent decades principally through the work of Alex Kidson, formerly of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, who has mounted an exhibition of Romney's works and published an excellent accompanying catalogue (Kidson 2002), as well as a *catalogue raisonné* of Romney's paintings in three volumes (Kidson 2015).

Figure 6.2.5.1. Henry Fuseli, R. A. *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent*. 1790 (Schiff 716). Diploma Work, accepted 1790. Oil on canvas, 133.0 × 94.60 cm. © Royal Academy of Arts, London; Photographer: John Hammond.

and Ozias Humphrey. His Norse mythological images show the direct influence of both classical sculpture and the new aesthetic of the sublime. On the one hand, his figures are often modelled on classical sculptures, naked and muscular; on the other, they are usually depicted at the moment of confrontation with mysterious supernatural forces, as in the several images Fuseli created to illustrate the encounter between the god Óðinn and a prophetess (*vǫlva*) in the god's quest to recover his dead son Baldr from the underworld. At least four depictions by Fuseli of the subject 'Odin in the underworld' are known (cf. Clunies Ross 1998, 121–23, pls 4–7). Fuseli's best-known work with a Norse mythological theme is his oil painting *Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent* (Figure 6.2.5.1), which was his diploma work (accepted 1790) for admission to the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Here the god Þórr, depicted as a young warrior, naked but for a shining helmet and a swirling cloak, stands in triumph atop the coils of the gigantic World Serpent below him, with a taut bloodied fish-hook plunged into the serpent's mouth, while in the background the giant Hymir cowers at the back of the boat the pair have rowed out to sea. In the top left-hand corner of the painting a mini-figure, presumably representing Óðinn, surveys the scene from above.

William Blake was also able to combine the literary and visual arts in strikingly original ways to reveal his mastery of the primitive and his ability to express the power of myth. His watercolour illustrations to the works of Thomas Gray were one of several sets of illustrations he created for his own and other poets' works. In 1797 he produced a set of illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* and used the same technique (and some of the same Whatman paper) to prepare another set of 116 watercolour illustrations to Gray's poetry. These watercolours were commissioned by the sculptor John Flaxman in 1797 as a gift for his wife Ann, and were probably produced during 1797–98. Blake cut windows in large sheets of Whatman paper and mounted in them the texts of Gray's poems cut out from an octavo edition of *Poems by Mr. Gray* published in 1790 by John Murray. Outside and around the text boxes were Blake's illustrations, usually of a particular line or a striking image in the text passage, selected and marked with a cross. Blake's *Illustrations to Gray's 'Poems'* are now all freely available in an electronic edition hosted by the Yale Center for British Art, where they are kept.[2]

[2] See <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/copy.xq?copyid=but335.1&java=no> [accessed 25 August 2015].

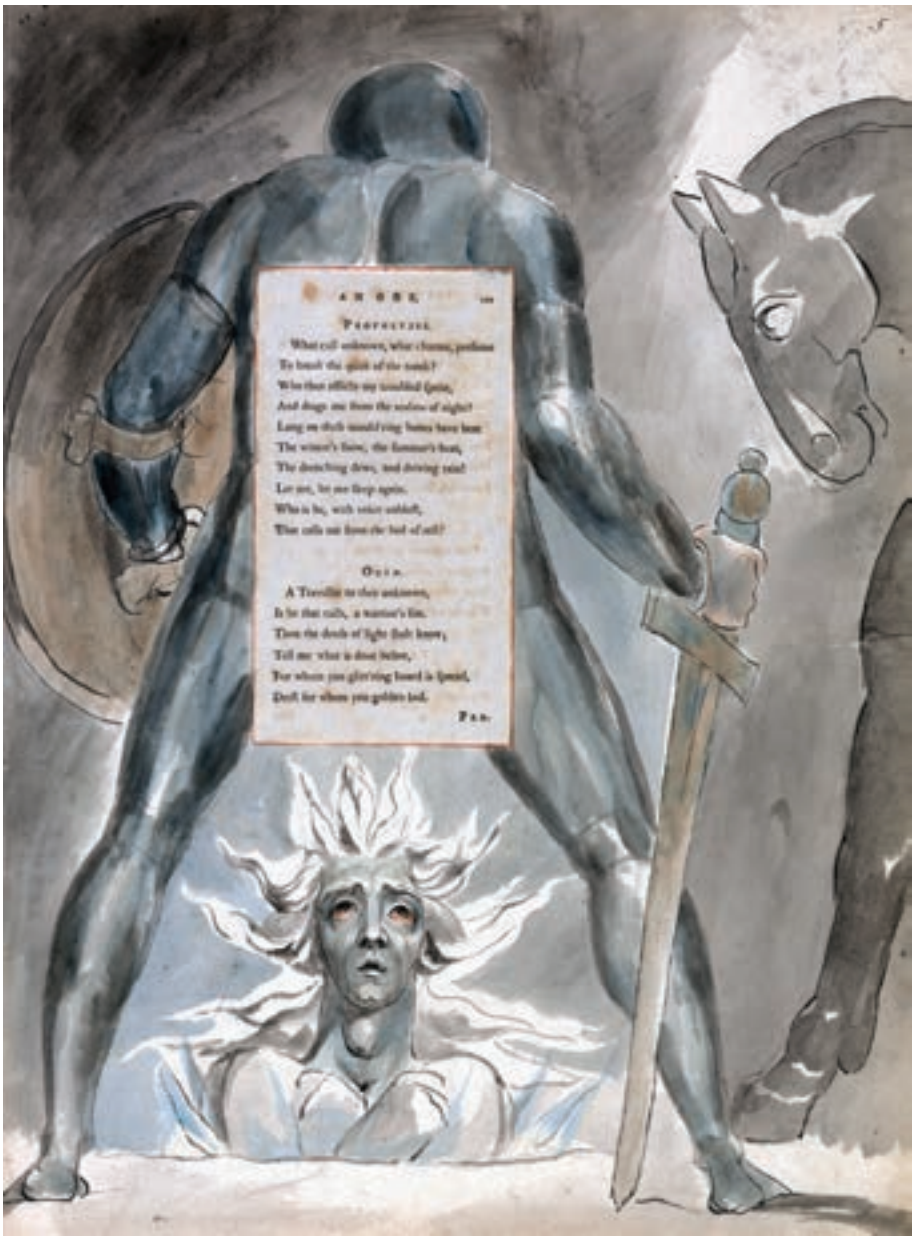

Figure 6.2.5.2. William Blake, *The Descent of Odin*, in *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, Design 81. Between 1797 and 1798. Watercolour with pen and black ink and graphite on moderately thick, slightly textured, cream wove paper with inlaid letterpress page. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

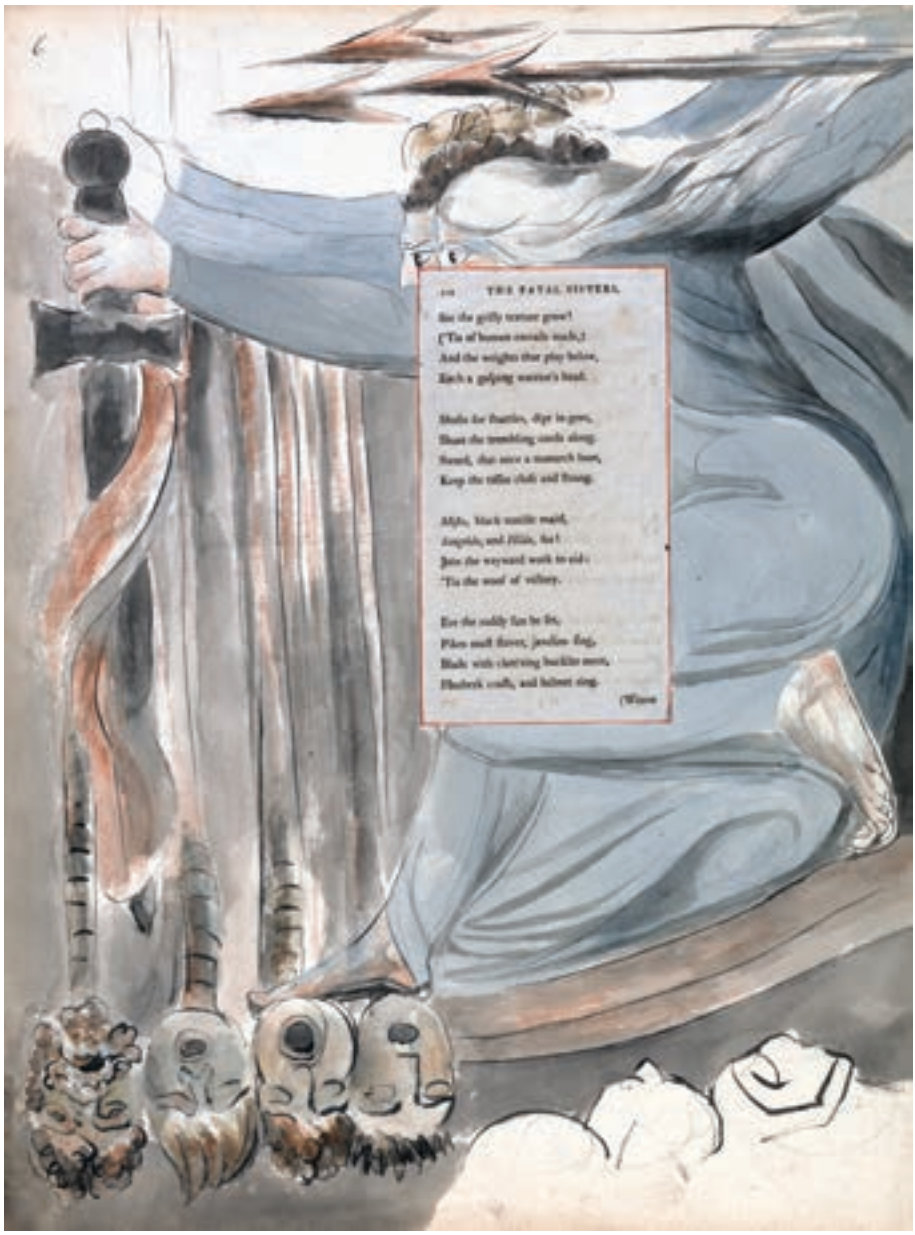

Figure 6.2.5.3. William Blake, *The Fatal Sisters*, in *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, Design 71. Between 1797 and 1798. Watercolour with pen and black ink and graphite on moderately thick, slightly textured, cream wove paper with inlaid letterpress page. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Of the 116 illustrations to Gray's poems, ten each are devoted to *The Fatal Sisters* (Butlin 335.67–76) and *The Descent of Odin* (Butlin 335.77–86). One of these (Butlin 335.83) has been reproduced to illustrate Chapter 5.8 on the reception of *Baldrs draumar* (Figure 5.8.1 there) and shows Baldr's avenger. Another (Butlin 335.81; Figure 6.2.5.2 here), more typical of Blake's powerfully dramatic style, depicts the moment of confrontation between the god Odin and the prophetess whom he has forced to rise from the dead and speak to him about his son Baldr's fate. The huge and muscular figure of the god, with a shield in his left hand and a sword in his right, is seen from behind, towering over the scene, from the base of which the prophetess begins to rise, facing Odin and the viewer, with hair spreading in all directions like the sun's rays and an anguished look in her eyes. The god's horse looks on from the right-hand side of the picture.

Blake's illustrations to *The Fatal Sisters*, as befits their Old Norse subject, are even more grotesque than those to *The Descent of Odin*. The Old Norse poem *Darraðarljóð* deals with the paranormal experience of a young man in Caithness, shortly before the Battle of Clontarf in Ireland (1014), who appears to see a group of supernatural beings, understood in the poem to be valkyries,[3] who ride up to a building and disappear inside. The young man goes to the window and sees inside a group of women weaving, but their raw material is not thread, and they are not weaving cloth; rather they use the guts of dead warriors to produce their gruesome weft. According to *Njáls saga*, in which this poem is cited, the valkyries' actions presage the deaths of the Scandinavian warriors who will shortly participate in the battle. Blake's illustration (Butlin 335.72; Figure 6.2.5.3 here) visualizes the third stanza of Gray's poem (ll. 9–12):

> See the grisly texture grow,
> ('Tis of human entrails made,)
> And the weights that play below,
> Each a gasping warrior's head.

The image shows four heads, in place of loom weights, strung up by their entrails, with an enormous and powerful female figure hard at work weaving, using a sword instead of a weaver's shuttle.

[3] Gray added a note to the reader on the then unfamiliar word *Valkyriur* ('valkyries'), giving the correct Old Norse nominative plural form, describing these beings as 'female Divinities, Servants to Odin (or Woden) in the Gothic mythology'. He further explained their name, correctly, as meaning 'Chusers of the Slain'. Gray's is the first recorded citation of this term in the English language, according to the *OED* online (2nd edn, accessed 25 August 2015).

Figure 6.2.5.4. George Romney, *The Descent of Odin*. Probably after 1775. Cartoon in black chalk on paper. Inv. no. 4046. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery. Photograph courtesy of Walker Art Gallery.

It cannot be claimed that Blake's illustrations to Gray's Old Norse odes were well known and influential in the nineteenth century, although his general influence was strong. In fact, the existence of these illustrations was largely forgotten until Sir Herbert Grierson rediscovered them in 1919 (Grierson 1922). It also has to be said that George Romney's several illustrations of Odin before the prophetess (also illustrating Gray's version of *Baldrs draumar*) were not well known in his own day and have only achieved their place among the most important examples of British art with Norse mythological themes in recent decades (cf. Clunies Ross 1998: 124–27, 135–37; Kidson 2002: 133).[4]

[4] Romney's illustrations of this encounter include two pen and ink drawings of *c*. 1775–77, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (*Pencil Sketch for Odin before the Prophetess*, M. D. 28 and *Odin before the Prophetess*, B. V. 55), another pen and ink drawing, formerly in the Royal Institute of Cornwall, Truro, and the black chalk cartoon described here and represented in Figure 6.2.5.4; for images of all these, see Clunies Ross 1998: 124–27, pls 8–11; for a discussion, see Kidson 2002: 133.

The most striking of Romney's representations of Odin and the prophetess is a black chalk cartoon, *The Descent of Odin* (Kidson 2002: 133, no. 72, Figure 6.2.5.4), now in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. This image shows the influence of Fuseli's depictions of the same subject in the 1770s, and was probably drawn not very long after Romney's return to England in 1775. However, in its medium of black chalk and through its figural subjects, which are more reminiscent of medieval than classical models, Romney creates a supernatural atmosphere, enhanced by intense chiaroscuro, that transcends obvious classical influence, although many of his other cartoons, like *Nature Unveiling Herself to the Infant Shakespeare*, certainly show the influence of classical statuary (cf. Kidson 2002: 118–39).

British Romanticism and Norse Mythology

By the late 1820s all three of the major pre-Romantic artists to treat Old Norse mythic themes, Romney, Fuseli and Blake, were dead. The most important Romantic painters of the early nineteenth century, John Constable (1776–1837) and J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), were primarily landscape rather than history painters, and gained their reputations through the elevation of landscape painting as a vehicle for the expression of the intense spirituality of natural forms and, in Turner's case, of violent and vivid natural events, like shipwrecks and thunderstorms. Unlike the German painter Caspar David Friedrich and his Scandinavian followers (see Chapter 6.2.3 above), however, British artists of the early nineteenth century rarely depicted symbols of prehistoric or medieval antiquity, like dolmens or ruined churches, in the landscapes of their paintings, so there is little evidence of the use of Norse mythological motifs nor of the representation of ancient Nordic religious cults in British art of this period. In this respect there is a parallel with what happened — or rather did not happen — within English literary Romanticism, as described by Heather O'Donoghue in Chapter 5.6. An initial interest in Norse myth fizzled out, and the English Romantics made little use of Norse mythology, whether in literature or the visual arts.

The pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, comprising initially the painters John Everett Millias, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, was founded in 1848 but was already almost defunct by 1853, though its influence and the works of several of its peripheral members, like William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, continued many of its basic principles during later decades of the nineteenth century. Pre-Raphaelite art is distinguished by both technique and subject matter. As their name implies, the Pre-Raphaelites were inspired by

Italian art of the Quattrocento and by medieval art more generally. In technique bright, naturalistic detail of both scenery, human forms and clothing imitates similar qualities in medieval art, while the human subjects of pre-Raphaelite art were often taken from literature, particularly from earlier English literature, where Chaucer and Shakespeare were favourites, or from Arthurian romance, which could and did claim British ancestry. Almost all subjects of pre-Raphaelite art, with the exception of some landscapes of Mediterranean provenance, are British and often medieval (cf. the images in Staley and Newall 2005).

It may seem curious at first sight that British artists took so little interest in Norse mythology as a subject for their compositions at a time when British writers like Thomas Carlyle were emphasizing the close bond between British culture and that of Scandinavia,[5] when Old Norse texts were becoming increasingly available in reputable editions and translations, and where Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities*, bringing the work of Paul Henri Mallet and a version of Snorri's *Edda* to a British audience, had already gone through two editions by 1809, and a third enlarged edition by I. A. Blackwell by 1847. Granted, British artists had plenty of more familiar British subjects at their disposal, and this perhaps explains in part why they did not use Norse motifs. In spite of the growing Victorian literary interest in the Old North (Wawn 2000), scenes from the medieval tales of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table or the tragic suicide of Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* were much better known and more powerfully evocative subjects for British artists than myths of Thor and Odin (cf. Wilson 1997: 56–62). It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the growing interest in the operas of Wagner that popularised the legend of the Nibelungs and the concept of *Götterdammerung* that visual artists began to depict such themes, and there, of course, they did not come directly from Old Norse sources but rather via Wagner's interpretation of them (cf. Chapter 4.1 on Wagner in Vol. II).

Fairies, Dwarfs and Other Little People

A notable exception to British artists' apparent lack of interest in Old Norse myths is the Victorian fascination with images of fairies, goblins, dwarfs and other small, often grotesque supernatural beings, some of which may have been inspired by Old Norse myth (Wood 2000). This interest in lesser supernatural

[5] Carlyle described Scandinavian paganism as 'the creed of our fathers; the men whose blood still runs in our veins' in *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840), Lecture 1: 'The Hero as Divinity. Odin. Paganism. Scandinavian Mythology', 1–37 at 14.

beings, rather than the gods of the pagan pantheons, was partly the result of the growing nineteenth-century interest in folklore, and was given considerable respectability by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, published in 1812–15 and translated into English not long afterwards by Edgar Taylor as *German Popular Stories* (1823–26), with illustrations by George Cruikshank. Another probable reason why images of lesser supernatural beings were preferred over the pagan gods themselves at this time is that the popular fictions in which they were represented were associated with the supposed innocence of childhood and were thus freed from potentially awkward associations with paganism, idolatry and any notion of belief in such beings. As Thomas Keightley claimed in his *Tales and Popular Fictions* (1834: 10), 'popular fictions bring back the memory of childhood'.

An early and persistent feature of British collections of folk-tales and popular fictions was that they were illustrated with line drawings (discussed below), and this conjunction probably influenced the fashion for fairy paintings independently of book illustration. An early British collection of European, including Scandinavian and British, folk-tales, which included a section on 'Eddas and Sagas', mentioning 'The Alfar' and 'The Duergar', was the influential book *The Fairy Mythology, Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries* by Thomas Keightley, first published in 1828 and reprinted several times in revised and enlarged editions during the nineteenth century. It was illustrated by W. H. Brooke. Keightley's collection encouraged comparisons between the folklore of various European countries and parallels further afield, and he went on to write the first book in English to identify common folk-tale plots and incidents, anticipating the twentieth-century analysis of tale-types and motifs by scholars such as Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. This work was entitled *Tales and Popular Fictions: Their Resemblance and Transmission from Country to Country* (1834).

Although there are many fairy images in British paintings and drawings of the nineteenth century, relatively few of these use specifically Scandinavian models and fewer still subjects from Old Norse mythology. An exception is some of the work of the illustrator and watercolour painter Richard Doyle (1824–83), who illustrated a number of books of fairy tales, including newly invented ones like John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851). Alongside Doyle's evident interest in modern Scandinavian folk-tales, he shows some knowledge of Old Norse mythology. His most interesting painting in this field is his watercolour entitled *The God Thor Drives the Dwarfs out of Scandinavia, by Throwing his Hammer at Them* (1878). In this painting (Figure 6.2.5.5), the upper part is occupied by a huge, blueish figure emerging from the cloudy sky,

brandishing his hammer, while below, in a rocky landscape, numerous small, dwarf-like figures scurry away. The event depicted does not correspond precisely to any known Norse myth, though Thor's general hostility to giants and at least one dwarf, Alvíss, is a mythological commonplace.[6]

Doyle's watercolour is characteristic of late nineteenth-century British artists' free combination of established motifs from Norse mythology, like Þórr's role as guardian of the world of gods and men against the incursions of giants and dwarfs, with material usually associated with folklore or possibly even freely invented, that has no exact precedent in Old Norse sources. We see the same type of creativity at work in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century retellings of Old Norse myths for general audiences, whether of adults or children, and here one cannot help but recognize the immensely popular narratives created by J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) as the logical extension of this tendency. In Tolkien's case, however, he created a consistent fantastic universe with its locations, inhabitants and invented languages in which to deploy his academic knowledge of Old Norse mythology.

Old Norse Myths in Book Illustrations

During the nineteenth century, well into the twentieth, and still today, illustrations of Old Norse myths in books have been the commonest means by which this subject has been expressed through a visual medium in the English-language tradition. As in Scandinavia and Germany, book illustration has proved the most frequently used and most durable medium for the representation of Old Norse myth and religious belief. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as new media have developed in film, television, video, comic strips and various social media, the opportunities for illustration have diversified, but their origin can probably be traced back to nineteenth-century book illustration.

It is possible to distinguish three main types of illustration of Old Norse themes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books published in Britain, in two of which we find depictions of mythological subjects. The first is travel literature, especially books on travel in Iceland (cf. Baring-Gould 1863; Morris 1911 [1871–73]; Collingwood and Stefánsson 1899), but most of the illustrations in this genre are of striking natural scenes rather than mythological ones, often without human subjects, or of what the travel writers called 'saga-steads', that is, line drawings of places that figured prominently in family sagas, like

[6] The painting was first exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, in 1878; it was sold by Sotheby's New York in May 2012 to an unidentified buyer.

Figure 6.2.5.5. Richard Doyle, *The God Thor Drives the Dwarfs out of Scandinavia, by Throwing his Hammer at Them*. 1878. Watercolour on paper, 48.3 × 66.7 cm. Sold Sotheby's, New York, 4 May 2012. Present location unknown. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's.

Figure 6.2.5.6. Finnur Magnússon, *Verdenstræet Yggdrasill* ('The World Tree Yggdrasill'). *c*. 1824–25. End-paper to vol. IV of his *Eddalæren* (1824–26).
The illustration bears the inscription 'Bagge sc.'.

the farmsteads of characters like Njáll Þorgeirsson or Gunnarr Hámundarson in *Njáls saga*. However, there are two other genres in which images of Norse mythology do sometimes appear. The first of these comprises works that include images illustrative of the fundamental spatio-temporal structures of Old Norse mythology, as deduced from medieval texts like Snorri's *Edda* and the Poetic Edda, often in the form of diagrams; the second involves images illustrating retold mythic narratives, particularly, but by no means exclusively, in books designed for children.

It is arguable that the first type was pioneered by the Icelandic scholar Finnur Magnússon (Finn Magnusen, 1781–1847), who lived in Denmark for much of his adult life but had a number of British friends (cf. Clunies Ross 2011). He sent two of these friends, the antiquary Sir Walter Trevelyan and Robert Jamieson, the Scottish ballad collector, watercolour illustrations of Norse cosmology,[7] which were probably preparatory to the designs that appeared as *De ni verdener* ('The Nine Worlds') and *Verdenstræet Yggdrasill* ('The World Tree Yggdrasill') (Figure 6.2.5.6) in the end-papers to Volume IV of his four-volume work on Norse mythology compared with other world mythologies, *Eddalæren og dens oprindelse* ('The Edda-Teaching and its Origin') (1824–26). Finnur Magnússon's idea, which was new at the time, was to use diagrammatic visual images to represent the spatio-temporal world of Old Norse myth, which, in the medieval texts, appears only through verbal descriptions.

The image of the World Tree, Yggdrasill, had a much longer life in the British tradition (and more generally) outside Finnur Magnússon's treatise, and it lives on in various permutations into the twenty-first century. It may have been the inspiration for the prominence Thomas Carlyle accorded to the image of the World Tree, which he called 'Igdrasil', in the first lecture of *On Heroes* (1840: 24–25) on Norse myth and Odin in particular: 'All Life is figured by them [the early Scandinavians] as a Tree [...]. The rustle of it is the noise of Human Existence, onwards from of old'. The editor of the third edition of Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities* (1847), I. A. Blackwell, reused Finnur Magnússon's image as the new edition's frontispiece, and from there this diagrammatic representation of what has come to be called the vertical axis of the Norse mythological world (cf. Meletinskij 1973–74) is likely to have influenced the thinking of many English-speaking readers, because Blackwell's edition of *Northern Antiquities*, published in the Bohn's Antiquarian Library

[7] These are respectively Society of Antiquaries MS 289: 'Cosmology' and a small quarto booklet, entitled *Oldnordisk Verdensbetragtning Fremstilt ved Finn Magnusen* ('Old Nordic World-View Produced by Finn Magnusen'), in London, British Library, 4505 e 35.

Figure 6.2.5.7. Anonymous, 'Iduna and the Ellewomen', from *The Heroes of Asgard* (1857), opposite p. 191.

series, remained popular well into the twentieth century. Its descendants can be identified in a number of popular books on Norse mythology, like Brian Branston's *Gods of the North* (1955, rev. edn 1980), as well as in textbooks for university students, such as E. V. Gordon's *An Introduction to Old Norse* (first edn, 1927; 2nd edn rev. A. R. Taylor, 1957).[8]

The second type of book illustration, found in a variety of texts that retell Norse myths, often for children, or present English translations of mythic texts like the Poetic Edda or Snorri's *Edda*, attempts to capture a dramatic moment

[8] Cf. with Finnur Magnússon's *Yggdrasill*, fig. 8, 'The Worlds in the Tree', in Branston 1955 and the diagram in Gordon rev. Taylor 1957: 196.

in a specific Old Norse mythic narrative, like Þórr's encounter with the giant Skrýmir on his journey to Útgarða-Loki. One of the most influential books of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries for both children and adults, *The Heroes of Asgard and the Giants of Jötunheim*, first published in 1857 by Annie and Eliza Keary, in fact combines the two modes of book illustration in its first edition, having the image 'The Scandinavian World' facing its title page, which is based on Finnur Magnússon's *Yggdrasill*, borrowed with acknowledgement from the third edition of *Northern Antiquities*, together with five unattributed full-page line drawings of episodes from Norse myths. Interestingly, aside from 'Thor's Attack on the Giant Skrymir', opposite page 74, none of the other illustrations are true to the narratives of Snorri's *Edda*.[9] Rather, they and the prose tales they illustrate blend the stories that Snorri tells with motifs and characters taken from folk-tales or from the authors' imaginations. The illustrations place the characters of Old Norse myth in settings more reminiscent of folklore than myth, and the scenes that were selected for illustration all contain Norse gods engaging with dwarfs and other lesser supernatural beings, not all of which are even mentioned in the medieval Scandinavian sources.[10]

A similar interweaving of Norse 'mythological facts' (Pitt 1893: 6) and contemporary fancy (or fantasy) into a seamless narrative whole that also incorporates moralizing interpretation of the mythic narratives, can be found in books directed at an adult audience of general readers 'with no time for study themselves' (Pitt 1893: 4). Ruth J. Pitt's illustrated *The Tragedy of the Norse Gods* (1893) is a good example of this type. Although she lists scholarly or semi-scholarly books among her sources (1893: 6), including Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, she is in no way inhibited from using those sources creatively in pursuit of a series of narratives that culminate in 'the old, old fight of good and evil' at Ragnarök and its aftermath, which her final chapter entitles 'The

[9] These and the following observations apply to the first edition of *On Heroes* only; the second and later editions dispensed with Yggdrasill and many of the illustrations in the first edition, substituting a different set that were closer to the narrative subjects of Snorri's *Edda*, though still having an emphasis upon lesser supernatural beings.

[10] For example, opposite page 191 is an illustration of 'Iduna and the Ellewomen' (Figure 6.2.5.7), and the prose narrative explains that Ellewomen are hollow behind and have no heart, so cannot pity anyone. These creatures are not found in Old Norse myths, but 'Elle-maids' are mentioned among the Scandinavian folk-tales in Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* (1828: 89–92), among other sources. Wawn (2000: 197–99) offers a good analysis of the ideology behind *Heroes of Asgard*, but says nothing about the illustrations. See also the chapter on children's literature in Vol. 11 by David Clark.

Resurrection'. Although the outlines of the mythology are clearly recognizable, and the characters bear some vague resemblance to those of *Snorra Edda* and eddic poetry ('Frea', a combination of Frigg and Freyja, is 'the world-mother', 'Niörd' is 'the priest of holiness' and so on), the way in which the plot is developed and interwoven with extraneous, often Christian, material produces a new kind of mythic narrative that is at one and the same time rather crassly sentimental and astutely understanding of the meanings of the myths that it so often transforms for its late Victorian audiences.[11]

The Contribution of W. G. Collingwood (1854–1932)

This chapter concludes with a section on the significant artistic output of William Gershom Collingwood (1854–1932). Collingwood was an artist and scholar whose work included book illustration and independent paintings as well as writings on Old Norse-Icelandic culture. He is well known for his interest in the Norse cultural influence in the English Lake District and for his interest in Iceland and Old Norse studies in general (Townend 2009). He was, among other things, a very talented artist, and produced numerous watercolours and pen-and-ink sketches of the Icelandic landscape and sagasteads (Collingwood and Stefánsson 1899), a book recently made available in an excellent reprint from the first edition, with an introduction and additional colour photographs of some of the scenes that Collingwood painted by Matthias Egeler (2015). He is perhaps most famous for his painting of the Law Rock and an imagined Althing at Þingvellir, 'The Parliament of Ancient Iceland', crowded with Icelanders dressed in medieval costumes (see Townend 2009: 107–09, 234 and pl. 7 there). Towards the end of the period in which he was actively involved in painting and drawing Norse subjects, he developed a number of figural scenes, some of which involved the depiction of myths (Townend 2009: 234–41). These are not well known. Some of them were apparently watercolours, others pen-and-ink sketches for those watercolours, and still others illustrations for a translation of the mythological poems of the Poetic Edda by Olive Bray, published in 1908 by the Viking Club in London.

[11] It has been common to denigrate the rise of popular retellings of Norse myths in the late nineteenth century (so Wilson 1997: 61–62), but they are important witnesses to the reception of the subject and were clearly precursors of the use of Norse mythological themes in the fantasy literature and visual media of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Figure 6.2.5.8. W. G. Collingwood, *Njord und Skadi*. Courtesy of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Lakeland Arts Trust, Kendal, Cumbria, UK.

Collingwood's mythological drawings and paintings are perhaps the closest any British artist of the late nineteenth century came to realising a pre-Raphaelite perspective on Old Norse myth. His ambitious 'The Bridge of the Gods' or 'The Northern Gods Descending', painted largely in 1901 (Townend 2009: 235 and n. 187), and displayed in an elaborate carved wooden frame, full of animal interlace and with a runic caption, depicts the Norse gods — Odin, Frigg, Baldr, Nanna, Thor, Týr, Njörd and Skadi, Frey and Freyja — descending the rainbow bridge Bifrǫst, each holding his or her distinguishing symbol. The group is led by a blond-haired, beautiful Freyja, whose white robes are tinged with the colours of the shining rainbow (see, for the image, Townend 2009: pl. 8, opposite p. 105). This image of Freyja was the subject of a separate study, 'Study for Freyja in the Rainbow', now in Tullie House Museum, Carlisle.

Yet another of Collingwood's paintings with a mythological subject is the little-known painting of Njǫrðr and Skaði, now in the Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (Figure 6.2.5.8). It would seem that Collingwood drew and painted this pair of deities several times (Townend 2009: 234–35), and they certainly appear as a pair of line drawings in his illustrations to Olive Bray's translations of fragments from Snorri's *Edda* (Bray 1908: 270–71). In the Abbot Hall watercolour, however, the partially naked pair are depicted as physically together but mentally apart in a moment that is perhaps post-coital, with Skaði lying almost comatose with closed eyes and Njǫrðr sitting facing away from her, gazing into the distance with a troubled expression on his face. In the background to Skaði's figure are the dark green pine woods and rugged mountain slopes of her natural environment, while Njǫrðr gazes into the blue distance towards his home in the sea. This beautiful image and those of 'The Bridge of the Gods' are fully in the pre-Raphaelite tradition of mythological painting.

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Part 7
Enabling Philology

7.1 – Enabling Philology: Essential Preconditions for a Scholarly Reception of the Pre-Christian Religions of the North

Margaret Clunies Ross

Although it could be argued that the *zeitgeist* is often more powerful than scientific knowledge alone when it comes to achieving paradigm shifts in societal attitudes, it was not possible for the scholarly reception of knowledge about the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia to advance greatly beyond the level of the late eighteenth century until more of the fundamental evidence for the nature of these pre-Christian religions had become available to scholars and the general public alike. What was needed for this to happen were advances in accurate knowledge of the Old Norse language. Old Norse was principally expressed through texts created by Icelanders, and to a lesser extent by Norwegians and Orcadians, in the period from *c*. 1180 to some time in the fifteenth century, and preserved by them through hand copying of earlier texts, often well into the post-medieval period. Until the end of the eighteenth century Icelanders were instrumental in making their own early records avail-

Margaret Clunies Ross is Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Sydney, Adjunct Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide and an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Her main areas of interest are Old Norse mythology and religion and their post-medieval reception, Old Norse poetry and poetics and the development of saga prosimetrum. Her publications include *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987), *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols. (1994–98), *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750–1820* (1998) and *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (2010).

The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Volume 1: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, PCRN-RR 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) pp. 581–591
BREPOLS PUBLISHERS 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.115275

able to the wider world, usually in Icelandic versions with Latin and sometimes vernacular Swedish or Danish translations (cf. Chapters 3.1 and 3.2).

Improvements in the level of general knowledge about early Nordic culture required the production of reliable texts of key works, such as the Poetic Edda, Snorri's *Edda* and many sagas, with or without facing-page translations, as well as the compilation of glossaries, dictionaries and grammars of Old Norse-Icelandic, so that people could properly understand the texts they were reading.[1] Some progress was made towards the publication of some of these aids during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the quality of many editions of this period was dubious, being often based on unreliable manuscripts, and the availability of dictionaries and grammars was restricted, particularly in countries outside Scandinavia (cf. Clunies Ross and Collins 2004: 28, 159, 172).

The other major source of modern knowledge of the pre-Christian religions of the North, the discipline of archaeology, was still largely the province of amateur antiquarians during the eighteenth century, although a number of significant studies of ancient sites and artefacts had already taken place. Their results often aroused the interest of Romantic artists and writers, for whom prehistoric dolmens and stone circles, for example, became symbols of prehistoric Nordic culture more generally (see, for example, Johan Christian Dahl's *Winter by the Sognefjord* discussed in Chapter 6.2.3). The development of a rigorous methodology of excavation and dating of artefacts by means of their stratigraphical context did not take place until some way into the nineteenth century, and in this Scandinavian, and particularly Danish, archaeologists were in the forefront of those who sought to establish a chronological framework for the dating of the growing number of material artefacts surviving from prehistoric times, including those of religious significance (Klindt-Jensen 1975: 46–67).

It was in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth that great progress was made towards providing the requisite editions, grammars and dictionaries for scholars and interested laypeople to use in studying the pre-Christian religions of the North. And this progress coincided with, and was inspired by, a new kind of study of European culture viewed in the light of comparative research into language, religion and human culture in a world context. The languages, religions and myths of European cultures were increasingly being compared with those of the wider worlds, including the Americas and the Indian subcontinent, whose cultures were being opened

[1] Accuracy alone does not, of course, guard against misunderstanding or wilful or unwitting misinterpretation, but it at least makes understanding of what a medieval author might have meant possible.

up to trade, settlement and other forms of contact. The comparative method, first developed in the field of comparative philology (German *vergleichende Philologie*), and by Danish and German scholars in the first instance, acted as a stimulus to European intellectuals to see their own cultures in a new light and to discover analogies between the myths and religions of pre-Christian Europe and more exotic cultures, such as those of India and Persia (now usually named Iran).

One of the first scholars to promote the idea that most of the languages of Europe were related to a wider group, now usually termed Indo-European, was the British orientalist, judge and employee of the British East India Company, Sir William Jones (1746–94). Although ideas of the relationship between the languages of Europe, including ancient Greek and Latin, and those of India and Iran were being discussed by many scholars who had become enthusiasts for their early literatures, it was Jones who inspired the birth of Indo-European historical linguistics, when he enunciated the first principles of comparative linguistics in his 'Third Anniversary Discourse' (1786) to the Asiatick Society of Bengal:

> The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which perhaps no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*; and the old *Persian* might be added to the same family. (Jones 1807: III, 34)

Jones's statement was revolutionary in several ways, especially given that he was delivering it before an audience of Europeans in the Indian city of Calcutta (now Kolkata). In the first place he claimed for Sanskrit, the classical language of many of his British Empire's Indian subjects, a more elevated place in the newly perceived Indo-European linguistic family than Greek or Latin, and then he argued boldly for the kinship and common ancestry of several European language groups (Gothic, meaning Germanic,[2] and Celtic) with Sanskrit and

[2] In English, the adjective 'Germanic' began to be used of the branch of the Indo-European language family that included the Scandinavian languages, English, German, Dutch, Frisian and Gothic, during the course of the eighteenth century (see *OED*, 2nd online edn, s.v. *Germanic* adj. B; accessed 7 May 2016), but 'German', 'Teuton(ic)' and 'Gothic' could also be

Persian. Although it was left to others to demonstrate Jones's hypotheses in detail, he traced a methodology in his 1786 lecture which was based on comparative, historically based analyses of grammatical structures and linguistic roots, rather than on the kind of speculative etymologizing that had often occupied linguists in earlier times.

Comparative linguistics became a major field of scholarly research in the early nineteenth century, and a number of scholars, especially in Scandinavia and Germany, published studies demonstrating the connections between languages based on the analysis of regular phonological variation of consonants, vowels and diphthongs and common grammatical structures. In order to undertake such comparative analysis, it was, of course, necessary for these scholars to have mastered the grammatical structure of the individual languages belonging to each family, and, in particular, to have understood the oldest known written language of each group in order to see how its descendants had derived from common structures. In the case of the Germanic group, this place is held by Old Norse for its Northern branch, Old English and Old Frisian for West Germanic, Old High German for Central Germanic and Gothic for East Germanic. However, aside from the text of the Gothic Bible, it is only Old Norse and Old English texts that have been recorded in any quantity and only Old Norse that holds any substantial record bearing on the Nordic pre-Christian religions. For these reasons, the ability to understand Old Norse, even if, as was then common, through a Latin translation, was crucial to the advancement of knowledge about the pre-Christian religions of the North.

It was thus inevitable that linguists working with the Germanic languages should embark on new studies of Old Norse. The production of rigorous new grammars and dictionaries of the language was part of a wider investigation of the relationship of Old Norse to other Indo-European languages, like Greek and Latin, and the relationship between Old Norse and Gothic. The most significant linguist working on Old Norse in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly the Danish scholar Rasmus Kristian Rask (1787–1832). Rask almost single-handedly put the study of Old Norse and several of the key medieval texts germane to a study of the pre-Christian religions of Scandinavia on a scientific footing, and did so within a period of only eight very productive years between 1811 and 1818. Rask's work was not only

used in this sense (see *OED*, 2nd online edn, s.v. *German* n. A 1.a, *Teuton* n. 2 and *Gothic* adj. and n. A. 2), though 'Gothic' in the sense of 'Germanic' fell out of use in English during the course of the nineteenth century.

significant in the field of linguistics (cf. Markey 1976: xiv), but, because he produced both a grammar and key Old Norse texts in scholarly editions, was instrumental in making resources available to those who wanted to work on Nordic mythology and pre-Christian religion.

In 1811 Rask published the first systematic grammar of Old Norse, his *Vejledning til det islandske eller gamle nordiske Sprog* ('Guide to the Icelandic or Old Norse Language') (Rask 1811; see Markey 1976: xxvi–xxx for an evaluation). In 1818 he published a substantially enlarged and updated Swedish version of his grammar as *Anvisning till Islándskan eller Nordiska Fornspråket* ('Instruction in the Ancient Icelandic or Nordic Language') (1818a), and yet another Danish version, *Kortfattet Vejledning til det oldnordiske eller gamle islandske Sprog* ('Concise Guide to the Icelandic or Old Norse Language') in 1832. The last volume was translated into English by G. P. Marsh (1838), while George Dasent (1843) translated the Swedish version. A German translation of the concise guide (Wienburg 1839) appeared shortly after that of Marsh. The Swedish version incorporated some improvements and sections on sound changes that had been suggested by Jacob Grimm in a review of the *Vejledning* published in 1812 (Grimm 1812).

Rask spent the years 1813–15 in Iceland, mastering the language and learning about its literature and culture, one outcome of which was his insightful essay *Undersøgelse om det gamle Nordiske eller Islandske Sprogs Oprindelse* ('Examination of the Origin of the old Nordic or Icelandic Language'), published in 1818 (1818b; repr. Harris 1999). This essay, which has never been translated from Danish, was written in response to a prize competition topic proposed by the Danish Academy of Sciences in 1811 on the subject of the original source of the old Scandinavian language. Although he did not yet know Sanskrit and spoke of the ancestor of Greek and Latin as Thracian, and the Germanic group as Gothic (cf. Baudusch 1963), Rask was able to outline how Old Norse showed regular phonological relationships with Greek and Latin words and laid the foundations for what has since been termed Grimm's Law, the regular correspondence of consonantal sounds among Indo-European languages. Jacob Grimm, after whom the law has come to be named, followed up on Rask's insight with much greater precision and detail in the second edition of his *Deutsche Grammatik* (Grimm 1822), but the initial discovery was Rask's.

Rask's interest in Old Norse led him to edit two key texts for the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North, the Poetic Edda and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. His editions of both these works were published in Stockholm in 1818 (Rask 1818c and 1818d). Of these, his edition of Snorri's *Edda* was the more significant work of scholarship, but its influence at the time was limited, no

doubt because it had no facing-page Latin translation, and all the editor's notes were in Modern Icelandic. There had been several earlier editions of versions of Snorri's *Edda*, but Rask's was the first to base itself on the manuscript that most modern editors regard as the best, the Codex Regius, GKS 2367 4to (R) of *c*. 1300 (Rask 1818c: 7–8). Resen's *Edda* (1665) had been based on the much augmented and revised early seventeenth-century text of Magnús Ólafsson, while Johan Göransson's *Edda* (1746), which was in any case incomplete, depended on the Uppsala manuscript DG 11 of *c*. 1300–25, the earliest medieval witness, but a manuscript that differs in some important respects from other medieval witnesses. Rask's edition, which had a number of scholarly notes in Icelandic, also included the four so-called grammatical treatises, published for the first time from the Codex Wormianus, AM 242 fol. of *c*. 1350. This edition was the very worthy and perceptive precursor to the grand mid-nineteenth-century Icelandic-Latin edition of Snorri's *Edda* (*SnE* 1848–87) and related texts from the principal manuscripts and fragments that appeared under the aegis of the Arnamagnæan Commission between 1848 and 1887.

In 1818 no full, scholarly edition of the complete Poetic Edda from the Codex Regius manuscript and other medieval manuscripts was available to readers and scholars.[3] The three-volume Arnamagnæan Commission's Icelandic-Latin edition had not yet been completed (see below). Two of the mythological poems, *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, had been fairly widely known since Resen appended them to his 1665 *Edda Islandorum* (cf. Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 above). Certain other eddic poems, like *Baldrs draumar* (cf. Chapter 5.8), were also known from versions and summaries in the compendia of Bartholin and Mallet, and a small number of these had by then been translated into various modern European languages, often many times over. A scholarly edition of the whole of the Poetic Edda, was, however, lacking at that time, though by 1828 the Arnamagnæan edition was complete.

Rask's 1818 edition of the so-called *Sæmundar Edda*, as the Poetic Edda was still often termed, provided the reader with Icelandic texts of seventeen poems classed as mythological and thirteen regarded as heroic. There were a number of editorial footnotes in Icelandic and a short preface, also in Icelandic, in which Rask mentioned the manuscripts he had used as the basis of his edition. Like other editors of this period, including those of the Arnamagnæan edition

[3] In Germany, however, two editions of the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda were produced in quick succession by Friedrich von der Hagen (1812) and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1815). For the connection of this activity to German Romanticism, see Chapter 5.1 above.

(*Edda 1787–1828*), Rask did not produce an edition solely of the poems in the Codex Regius and some related medieval witnesses, but combined these with poems found in seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manuscripts that were almost certainly not of medieval origin. Thus he included several items that would not find a place in a collection of medieval eddic poems today, poems like *Hrafnagaldr Óðins* and *Gunnarsslagur*, the last-named of which Rask states that he obtained when he was living in Iceland.[4]

Rask's edition of the Poetic Edda seems not to have been widely used outside Scandinavia, as it was not user-friendly for those who knew no Icelandic, whether ancient or modern. It was a different story with the edition produced in three large volumes by the Arnamagnæan Commission, staggered over the years 1787, 1818 and 1828 (*Edda 1787–1828*). This edition was very influential, not only among scholars but for writers, artists and the general public as well, both directly and indirectly through vernacular translations of its own Latin facing-page translations from Old Icelandic. The Arnamagnæan edition of the Poetic Edda did not only have a text of the poems based largely on the Codex Regius with facing Latin translation. It also boasted copious notes, also in Latin, with a glossary of Old Norse words and lists of names mentioned in the poetry. This was an edition that could serve as the basis for serious research into Norse mythology, translation into various European vernaculars, literary recreations and more besides. Each volume also had a preface directed at the reader. In Volume I it is of interest that the Preface drew comparisons between the mythological poems and classical mythology, on the one hand, and, on the other, Scandinavian popular beliefs and folklore, which *in ore vulgi adhuc supersunt* ('still survive in the mouth of the common people') (*Edda 1787–1828*: I, xi). The comparison with popular beliefs is an early example of an approach to Norse myth that was to become much more prominent during the nineteenth century, along with the rise of folklore studies.

Very shortly after the publication of Volume I (*Pars I: Odas mythologicas, a Resenio non editas, continens* ('Part I: Containing Mythological odes not edited by Resen'),[5] translations began to appear of mythological poems previously beyond the reach of most readers. To give one example of many, in England Amos Cottle's and William Herbert's translations of poems like *Vafþrúðnismál*

[4] Both these poems are discussed in Chapter 3.2 above on Icelandic Humanism.

[5] That is, excluding *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, which many readers were eager to have in a modern edition. They had to wait until the third volume was published in 1828 for that privilege.

and *Grímnismál* broke new ground as far as the reading public was concerned (O'Donoghue 2014: 104–08; see Part 5 of this Volume for the various national reactions, also Chapter 8.1). Whereas before 1787 very few eddic mythological poems had been known to the student and general reader, now most of the Old Norse poems in eddic metres with mythological subjects were available to them. Volume II, which came out in 1818, the year of Rask's edition, complemented the mythological group with *carmina mythico-historica* ('mythic-historical poems'). Volume III, which did not appear until 1828, contained the long-awaited editions of *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*, together with *Rígsþula* (there called *Rígsmál*), preserved in the Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.). Volume III includes an enormous *Lexicon Mythologicum* compiled by Finnur Magnússon (1781–1847), together with a treatise of comparative calendrical lore, demonstrating parallels between early Norse and various Asian time-reckoning systems, similar to the ideas Finnur Magnússon had already published in his *Eddalæren* (1824–26).

Rasmus Rask was by no means alone in his researches into comparative Germanic philology. The German scholars Friedrich von der Hagen, Franz Bopp and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm also began to publish in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Bopp in Indo-European comparative philology, beginning with his *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskrit-sprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache* ('Concerning the Conjugation System of the Sanskrit Language in Comparison with That of the Greek, Latin, Persian and Germanic Language') (1816), and Jacob Grimm in Germanic philology, with a series of comparative studies of German and its cognate languages, in several works all entitled *Deutsche Grammatik* ('German (*recte* Germanic) Grammar'). The first volume of these was published in 1819 and was quickly followed in 1822 by a second edition. In its Introduction the 1819 edition stressed the importance of the historical study of the German language and introduced a comparative study of inflexions of the Germanic languages, while the 1822 second edition of Volume I shows the influence of Rask in its discussion of comparative phonology and sound changes. Grimm went on to produce three more volumes of *Deutsche Grammatik* and his *Deutsche Mythologie* ('German (*recte* Germanic) Mythology') in 1835. These works, particularly the last-named, were to have a profound influence on the study of the pre-Christian religions of the North in the nineteenth century and later, and will be discussed in greater detail in Volume II of this study.

At this juncture, however, it may be noted how Grimm, through his inclusive use of the adjective *deutsch* to refer to all the Germanic languages, implic-

itly appropriated them to a common German familial sphere.[6] It may have seemed natural to early linguists to speak of language families when discussing the relationships between various groups of languages that were perceived to have grammatical, syntactic and lexical characteristics in common, but in fact the imagery of kinship came to have powerful overtones of political and social relationships as well as purely linguistic ones, that could be, and were, manipulated for non-scientific ends, as happened, particularly in connection with the Germanic group during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These developments will be traced in several chapters of Volume II of this study. And, though comparative linguistics was the first cab off the rank in the exploration of Indo-European cultural connections, the comparative study of European pre-Christian religions and myths was not far behind and provided a rich field for cultural misappropriation during the nineteenth century and beyond.

[6] Cf. Chapter 4.2 for a discussion of the development of ideas of a common Germanic culture and Chapter 5.1 for an explanation of how the appropriation of the medieval Scandinavian cultural inheritance by German Romantic authors came about.

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Part 8
The Early Grundtvig

8.1 – N. F. S. Grundtvig: The *Æsir* Intoxication and *Nordens Mytologi* (1808)

Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen

Grundtvig the Man

Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) is a household name to Danes. Serving as a vicar in the Danish Protestant Church from 1811 to 1872, he became known for writing new hymns, many of which were reprinted and included in the authorized 1852 hymnbook. Theologically he accentuated the Eucharist and the baptismal covenant, colloquially calling them 'the Table and the Bath'. As an educator he doggedly campaigned for the oral 'living' word against written 'dead' words. He also wrote national songs used in Danish schools and particularly at the Folk High Schools, which he initiated from 1844. He published six volumes of world history and one of church history and appeared most scholarly as an Anglo-Saxon philologist rediscovering ancient poets. From 1838 onwards he gained a reputation as a popular lecturer and political speaker, discussing public subjects which up to then were strictly controlled by the absolute Danish king and his officials. He was an active member of the first democratic Danish parliaments in 1848–58 and shortly again in 1866. His specific kind of occasional poetry was mobilized during the changing but eventually victorious achievements of the Danes in the first Schleswig-Holstein war in 1848–50 as well as at the total Danish defeat in the second in 1864. His national songs regained importance during the German occupation in 1940–45 and finally also in the post-World War II period when Denmark's

Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen served as Professor of Danish Literature at the University of Copenhagen from 1965 to 2007. His special interests include the later poetical use of Norse mythology, Grundtvig's works and Danish national identity.

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political relations to the rest of Europe were determined. By means of his Protestant faith and Christian conception of all secular history, Grundtvig managed to be arch-Danish and internationally minded at the same time. To an ever-growing group of admirers, he became a legend in his lifetime. An eyewitness reports that his funeral cortège through the streets of Copenhagen 'was in truth kingly' (Bradley 2008: 339–41), a national event.

Grundtvig was an active writer for seventy-four years, producing 1472 printed items of greatly varying kind, quality and size, ranging from single doggerels to sets of comprehensive volumes (Johansen 1948–54). Starting to preserve his manuscripts in 1798 at the age of fifteen, at his death he left about ninety thousand pages of manuscripts, sketches, drafts, excerpts and surveys, most of them deposited in the Grundtvig Archive of the Royal Library in Copenhagen. They are largely unpublished, and the vast majority of them employ old-fashioned Danish script.[1] All have been read by a team of scholars, but no single person has ever read all of them.

Apart from a limited number of short lyrical poems, epic ballads and Protestant hymns, very few of Grundtvig's texts are available in adequate translations in English or any other world language. Many of his writings react to occasions he had experienced or read about. His publications sold rather well, so he seldom lacked willing publishers, but few of his books were professionally reviewed. He certainly takes his place among the greatest Danish poets, but he never wrote one chief work of poetry that was widely read. In fact, not many Danes are familiar first-hand with many of his writings. Yet Grundtvig's influence on the mood and atmosphere of Danish everyday social and political life cannot be ignored. In a strange manner, he is in the air, perhaps even as a stronger legend than while he was alive.[2] Modern Danes discussing some issue in the public media quite often state in print or speech how incredible it is to record this or that to be the case 'even in the native country of Grundtvig'. As a conclusive argument, this phrase has become a modern proverb.

Grundtvig's personality was a mixed one. Generally he preferred fruitful growth to statuesque beauty, thus favouring imaginative poetry and despising finished paintings and polished sculptures, which to him represented only

[1] All of these manuscripts are entered in a modern register with a form duly filled in for each independent piece of text (Høirup and Topsøe-Jensen 1957–64). Volumes xxix–xxx feature comprehensive indices.

[2] The dust jacket cover composed by Steven M. Borish (Borish 1991) for the book based on his excellent anthropological fieldwork very appropriately shows a typical Danish country landscape with Grundtvig's face superimposed in the lightly clouded blue summer sky.

stagnation and petrifaction. He could beat time, but melodies escaped him, so he did not sing, and no fruitful co-operation with the fine composers of Danish Romanticism setting his poems to music is documented. He liked to read plays but did not go to the theatre, regarding the repetitive art of professional acting as a kind of offensive hypocrisy. He undertook four summer study tours to England in 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1843 and spent nine summer days in Norway in 1851, but otherwise he lived most of his life in Copenhagen and never cared to cross the Øresund to visit Sweden. Except for his outward passage to England in 1829, Grundtvig went to London via Kiel, Lübeck and Hamburg but did not visit other places in Germany. The Romance countries of Southern Europe were not attractive to him either. He travelled in time by perusing volumes of history books and chronicles in his study at home. And, though favouring oral communication, Grundtvig spent the greater and perhaps also the happiest part of his life alone at his writing-desk.

Grundtvig's engagement with Norse Mythology

Grundtvig's engagement with Norse mythology was a lasting love affair which, however, was not followed by the happy family life that he had hoped for.[3] He continued a Scandinavian tradition that utilized Old Norse myths and legends about native gods and legendary national heroes, beginning with Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturluson in the early thirteenth century and continuing with the Humanist scholars of the seventeenth century. This tradition almost dried up in the course of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which had little regard for such a supposedly barbaric period. A third wave, heralded by the young Danish pre-Romantic poet Johannes Ewald (1743–81) in the 1770s, was most fully realized by Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) in early Danish Romanticism from 1802 onwards (see Chapter 5.2 above). Grundtvig read both of them and joined them, only with a deeper interest in the pre-Christian religion, history and languages of Scandinavia.

Grundtvig's road to Norse mythology was a long and winding one. In his childhood home, a vicarage in the small South Sjælland village of Udby, his father's private library hardly featured the Æsir-faith. In a diary retrospect of May 1804 Grundtvig surveys his earliest years. As a schoolboy being privately

[3] This is the first of two chapters on Grundtvig's engagement with the pre-Christian religions and myths of Scandinavia. The second chapter on his later works is the first chapter of Volume II of *Research and Reception*.

tutored at the vicarage of Tyregod in Eastern Jutland from 1792–98, he had read in the very first clause of Arild Huitfeldt's *Danmarckis Rigis Krønnicke* ('Chronicle of the Kingdom of Denmark') (1595–1604, 2nd edn 1650–52) that next to nothing is known about the pagan religion of Scandinavia in former times. Huitfeldt thanked God for having taught the Danes to escape such blindness. His absolute dismissal depressed Grundtvig. He was therefore very pleased to acquaint himself with the Norse pre-Christian past, when he was a pupil at the Aarhus Cathedral School from 1798 to 1800, by borrowing from the school library the book *Om Odin og den Hedniske Gudelære udi Norden* ('On Odin and the Pagan Mythology of Scandinavia') (1771) by the celebrated Danish historian Peter Friedrich Suhm (1728–98). In his autobiographical poem *Udby Have* ('Udby Garden') (1811), Grundtvig confessed that he had shown sluggish arrogance in his childhood towards classical, biblical and historical topics. But though he familiarized himself in his Aarhus days with the ancient Norse deities Freyja, Loki, Freyr and Thor besides Charlemagne and his paladins and the chapbook hero Holger the Dane, he soon cast off all of these legends as mere nursery tales. In 1817 he claimed to have been attracted to the pagan past originally only by a *blind Naturdrift* ('blind instinct') (*US*: III, 518; cf. Grundtvig 1816–19: III, 179). At the University of Copenhagen in the years 1800–03 Grundtvig continued his independent private readings at random but lacked skilled direction. He cut an indifferent figure as a rationalistic student of divinity who did not even care to go to church. He graduated in October 1803, only twenty years old. Whatever office he might achieve, Grundtvig was sure that he had been born to lead the life of an author.

In his first Copenhagen period, Grundtvig was lucky to have had a qualified tutor of his own age, Peter Nikolai Skougaard (1783–1838), a fellow student. Skougaard was an excellent mathematician who, however, took greater interest in historical and linguistic topics and so became Grundtvig's first close friend. He knew Icelandic, could even decipher runic inscriptions and also knew about the ancient Norse texts preserved at the Arnamagnæan Collection of the Copenhagen University Library. He helped Grundtvig to start a qualified private investigation into Scandinavian heathendom. Later Grundtvig admitted that when he was a university student he looked upon ancient history like a man stealthily glancing at another man's fiancée.

Skougaard's enthusiasm impressed Grundtvig, and for the rest of his life he spoke admiringly about his friend as a person who once moved in learned circles 'as freely and easily as in his own home territory' (Bradley 2008: 512). However, because he published criticism in 1804 of a long-dead Danish absolute king, Skougaard was sentenced to a sensationally severe punishment the

following year, which automatically also brought him lifelong censorship. Feeling stigmatized, he gave up academic studies and finally left Copenhagen in 1807 to live for the rest of his days in the distant Jutland town of Aalborg. Contemporary evaluations of him at his death in 1838 differ, but he certainly never lived up to the great expectations he had engendered in his early youth. After a brief midsummer visit by Skougaard to Grundtvig in 1807, the two friends never met again, though they exchanged a few letters.

In addition to his advantageous friendship with Skougaard, Grundtvig followed the influential lectures that his older cousin, Henrich Steffens (1773–1845; their mothers were sisters), gave at the University of Copenhagen from November 1802. Steffens effectively brought about a Danish school of Romanticism. He drew a huge audience and was the talk of the town up to Christmas 1802. In his seventh lecture he called Norse mythology a late seed from first Oriental, then Greek mythology (Kondrup 1996: 121). This single line is all that can be found in his writings on the subject, except for two undistinguished survey lectures in German given at the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin in 1842 and printed in his posthumous works in 1846. He knew little about the field and did not really care for it.

As an unemployed theological candidate Grundtvig tried to pursue an independent career as an author, yet without luck. Besides two modern comedies in prose and some poems he wrote half a score of prose stories about characters from the Icelandic sagas in the sentimental manner of the late eighteenth century, preferably dealing with proud or shy but amorous female protagonists in distress. Sticking to psychological angles, Grundtvig deliberately avoided the supernatural elements of the sources. None of his attempts found a publisher, and, though preserved in readable formats, they remain unpublished.[4]

Advised and persuaded by Skougaard to translate *Jómsvíkinga saga* to acquire material for new stories, Grundtvig taught himself Icelandic at home in Udby in the course of nine summer weeks of 1804, so that this language would no longer prevent him like *en fiendtlig Genius* ('a hostile genius') from reading texts that had not yet been translated (Albeck 1979: 1, 178; retrospective diary entry of 31 December 1804; cf. *US*: 1, 67–69). He progressed by means of Icelandic books with parallel text versions in Latin or in a modern language printed alongside the original texts. For lack of a regular dictionary, he also created his own alphabetical list of words with a patience that surprised him.

[4] Copenhagen, Danish Royal Library, The Grundtvig Archive, MSS fascicles 492–95; see Lundgreen-Nielsen 1980: 84–111, 120–38.

Finally, he got so accustomed to the language that he was able to read texts that were solely available in Icelandic. Thus his continued Norse studies rested on a solid philological foundation.

His Icelandic readings soon made Grundtvig develop a personal poetical style in Danish, first in verse, then in prose, modelled respectively on the poems of the Poetic Edda, skaldic poems and the sagas. He mingled genuine archaisms with metaphors recalling Shakespeare or at least some of his modern successors such as Friedrich Schiller. He even tried to transfer and adapt Norse words and idioms which were incomprehensible to Danish readers. In February 1805 Grundtvig also studied recent Danish poetry that revived Norse myths and legends. He was excited by Johannes Ewald's prose tragedy *Rolf Krage* (1770), and by his tragic *singspiel* in iambic hendecasyllables *Balders Død* (1775) (both built upon Saxo's Latin *Gesta Danorum*). Grundtvig found the prose fairy-tale pastiche 'Vaulundur's Saga' in the second volume of Oehlenschläger's *Poetiske Skrifter* even better. He admired the verse tragedies about Earl Hakon the Mighty and Baldur the Good from Oehlenschläger's *Nordiske Digte* (1807) as matching or even surpassing Shakespeare. In his *World Chronicle* of 1812 Grundtvig considered the year 1807 to be the climax of Oehlenschläger's poetical achievement.

After his acquisition of the Icelandic language in 1804, Grundtvig widened his literary ambitions from fiction to history, including Norse mythology and its possible sources. Dissatisfied with what was available in print and in Danish translations, he started to delve into the still unedited Icelandic manuscripts at the Copenhagen University Library. Slowly, step by step, Grundtvig discerned a meaning in the Poetic Edda myths which gave him an increasingly coherent impression of the religious beliefs of the Norse forefathers. But so far he had neither published poetry nor scholarly papers on the matter.

From October 1803 until about March 1805, Grundtvig, finding himself without any personal obligations, spent his time freely alternating between stays with his parents at Udby and visits to his older brother at the vicarage of Torkildstrup on the island of Falster; otherwise he lived very modestly in Copenhagen near the public libraries. From the spring of 1805, he served as a residential private tutor at the modest estate of Egeløkke on the island of Langeland south of the Great Belt (about eighty miles from Copenhagen).[5]

[5] Precise dates for Grundtvig's travel to and arrival at Egeløkke in 1805 are missing, because ninety-two pages have been removed from his diary (maybe torn out by himself to conceal his passionate but hopeless infatuation with the mother of his pupil, Constance Leth).

Here in his plentiful spare time he could pursue his historical and linguistic interests by studying books borrowed from the Copenhagen University Library or from the private library of the local castle of Tranekjær. He even set up a small book club with a few neighbouring vicars, monthly furnished with assorted new publications by post from a Copenhagen bookseller. Otherwise this distant region of Denmark was devoid of academic challenges for Grundtvig, making him feel exiled like the Roman poet Ovid at Tomis on the Black Sea coast.

The Skaldic Vision

The next phase of his Norse studies from 1806 to 1810 Grundtvig himself (in 1817) termed his *Skjalde-Syn* ('skaldic vision') (*US*: III, 518) alternating with the negative label of an *Asaruus* ('Æsir intoxication'). Both words indicate a poetic and creative approach to mythology, in which he allowed himself from an inner vision to reconstruct pagan Norse religion from scattered remnants such as texts and archaeological finds. This approach was different from that of Norse mythological handbooks of the day, which tended to be satisfied to register or even just to alphabetize mythological figures and settings but did not strive for a complete or coherent picture of them; besides, their authors copied one another uncritically. For a long time Grundtvig also was uncertain how to proceed.

In a private excerpt book written in the summer of 1806 at Egeløkke, Grundtvig describes his enthusiasm for Karl Philipp Moritz's German handbook (1791) on Greek gods, titled *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (English translation by Jaeger 1830). Regarding the most significant myths as unlikely to be genuine religious cult texts or reliable historical evidence, Moritz emphasizes the poetical spirit contained in them. Grundtvig found this approach more attractive than anachronistic examinations following later rules of haphazard physics or of irrelevant philosophical systems — angles taken by some Enlightenment scholars.

He was also inspired by reading Norse myths in updated treatments in Danish that he felt were unacceptable or faulty. In his Egeløkke years he wrote four critical contributions on the topic for the respected Copenhagen periodical *Ny Minerva* ('New Minerva'), edited by Knud Lyne Rahbek (1760–1830). In *Lidet om Sangene i Edda* ('Brief Comment on the Songs of the Edda') published in September 1806, Grundtvig protested in spontaneous indignation at a weakly humorous but mostly dispassionate recreation of the poem *Skírnismál* called *Skirners Reise* ('Skirner's Journey'). It was printed in the May 1806 number of *Ny Minerva* with a brief postscript by the author, Jens Møller

(1779–1833), a diligent academic theologian, historian and critic. Grundtvig brushed aside Møller's suggestion that a reliable translation of a myth could serve as an interpretation of it. He further stated that an ancient myth should only be recreated in its own spirit, no matter whether one did it generally or only employed one or a small number of its original traits. An even better solution was to fill in or supplement the ancient shadow outline, and that to Grundtvig was the commendable method that had also been chosen by Oehlenschläger in his poetry. Grundtvig then drew attention to Møller's modern taste that repeatedly caused him to misunderstand the contents and intention of the Icelandic Skirner poem. His main argument against Møller was that he did not look at his source text as part of an all-embracing heathen philosophy. Instead, he emulated the versatile Danish poet Jens Baggesen (1764–1826) who had once tried to enliven a few Norse myths with a decidedly modern disrespect for pre-Christian faith. Grundtvig rightly added that Møller as a poet lacked stylistic elegance and was dull.

On the final pages of his entry, Grundtvig sketches his own interpretation of Norse mythology. He starts abruptly with the inexorable Norns (three female spirits of destiny) steadfastly preparing a catastrophe that brings about the downfall of the Æsir gods. Since these latter have been granted a keen sense of Eternity, the Norns must make them forget their true nature by tempting them to submit to lowly, finite or human motivations. In order to persuade a reluctant giant girl to make love to the god Freyr, Skírnir (his loyal servant and messenger) has to threaten her with a magical sword borrowed from his master, but according to Freyr the weapon is lost if drawn by anyone other than the owner. Then, later in the Ragnarōk battle against the evil giants, Freyr and the Æsir will sorely miss it. In similar ways the other gods forfeit their share of Eternity, which ultimately means death to them. From his growing knowledge of the Poetic Edda poems Grundtvig firmly believed that he could decipher their true meaning. Thus this text is the first printed evidence of his life-long preoccupation with Norse myths.

To illustrate his point of view, Grundtvig composed an alternative recreation of *Skírnismál* called *Freis Kærlighed* ('The Love of Frei') which was published in his *Nordens Mytologi* (1808), but in a reprint of 1815 he stated that it had originally been inserted (*indflettet*) into his handbook (Grundtvig 1815: 47), so was very likely already written in 1806.[6] It stressed the fatal consequence of

[6] An argument for the early dating might simply be the fact that Grundtvig does not mention there his later creation of All-Father, a supreme and invisible god who was probably the creator of everything.

the god giving way to a much too carnal passion that he should have resisted. Rejecting Møller's versified anecdote, Grundtvig saw in the myth one of many actions leading to the extermination of the Æsir as only temporary gods.[7]

At the same time Grundtvig felt struck by the concluding clause in Friedrich Schiller's prose introduction to his tragedy *The Bride of Messina* (1803), which pointed out that beneath all surfaces of religions one finds religion itself. Grundtvig used it as a motto for a periodical entry about religion and liturgy (actually finished on 1 October 1806 but not printed until February 1807). In an otherwise professional discussion of current theology he sketched the difference between Greek and Norse mythology: the nature-loving Greeks fancied a joyless existence after death in an underworld of shades, whereas Norse warriors were finding eternal happiness in Odin's Valhalla so that, rather than being a pale reflection of earthly life, death meant to them an intensified continuation of heroic life. Thus, skipping all unimportant details, Grundtvig came up with a really decisive distinction.

In the three first months of 1807, he seems to have let mythology rest, but two now lost letters from Skougaard in Aalborg got him started anew. Skougaard told him that professor and university librarian Rasmus Nyerup (1759–1829) in Copenhagen was very fond of the mythological paragraphs of his refutation of Jens Møller. This encouraged Grundtvig to address Nyerup directly. In private letters from Egeløkke, dated 1 and 15 May 1807, he asked him whether he might have books and perhaps even ancient Icelandic manuscripts sent to Egeløkke to facilitate his studies. Specifically he wanted to reread Suhm's treatise *On Odin*, remembering it favourably from his Aarhus school days though later having been unable to get hold of a copy anywhere (a reprint was never issued).

Grundtvig's Æsir Doctrine

On 22 May 1807 Grundtvig sent a regular essay *Om Asalæren* ('On the Æsir Doctrine') to Nyerup, asking him to hand it on to Rahbek for the delayed next number of *Ny Minerva*.[8] Grundtvig here used *Vǫluspá* — which, together

[7] In a private letter to Nyerup dated 6 January 1808, Grundtvig writes that his idea of reducing the Norse gods to temporary deities had lately been hinted at, perhaps remembering scattered and casual references in Suhm's treatise *Om Odin* (e.g. 1771: 7, 8, 148, 235, 290 and 315). Certainly Suhm did not draw the consequences of his observations, in general preferring to retell and vaguely harmonise his sources instead of sorting them out.

[8] Nyerup gave lectures between 1798 and 1800 at the University of Copenhagen on

with *Hávamál*, was the only mythical poem from the Poetic Edda not yet to have been published in a scholarly edition — as his main guide, supplemented by selected details from a dozen other eddic poems already published by the Arnamagnæan Commission in 1787. The result was the formation of an epic account which surprised him by the ease with which it poured out of his mind. In a retrospective diary entry of 24 June 1807 he found its form so strange, so off the track, that he tried to rewrite the text four times, but an improvement failed to appear.

Grundtvig supposes an eternal supreme god named All-Father, alias the creator of everything, who through three impartial Norns (goddesses of fate) stages a long fight between matter or raw material (giants who became emancipated to a self-styled animal existence) and the Æsir and Vanir gods, two tribes of temporary deities headed by Odin. In the Icelandic tradition (from Snorri's *Prose Edda*) All-Father — identified respectively in Icelandic and Danish as *Alfaðir* and *Alfader* — is one of numerous *heiti* (i.e., acknowledged denominations) for Odin. But the distinction between All-Father and Odin allows Grundtvig to presume an omniscient and omnipotent power or spirit reminiscent of the God of Genesis.[9] Yet in his text of 22 May this concept is not very clear. In a few scattered sentences written in a questioning tenor, Grundtvig mentions that All-Father created the Æsir gods as reproductions of himself, adding that they later deserted him to gain a *Tilværelse som uafhængig Individ* ('personal independence').[10] He further claims that such knowledge was soon either forgotten or distributed to growing groups of individual Æsir and Vanir gods specializing in different offices. Grundtvig takes for granted that religions generally start out with sound monotheism and later degenerate into an all-too-human polytheism.

Danish literary history together with Knud Lyne Rahbek, editor of *Ny Minerva*, usually for audiences of about fifteen persons.

[9] In *Nordens Mytologi* (1808; *US*: I, 261) this thesis is supported by a quotation in Latin from Tacitus's *Germania* (*c*. 98 AD, ch. 9) referring to the cult of ancient Germanic tribes absolutely excluding pictures or statues of their deities.

[10] *US*: I, 204 and 207–14, especially 209. This is a quality called *Ichheit* ('egoity') by the German Romantic philosopher J. G. Fichte (1762–1814). Grundtvig studied Fichte at Egeløkke in the autumn of 1805, finding his writings 'interesting' (cf. Albeck 1979: I, 229). Fichte took shelter in Copenhagen from 9 July to 11 August 1807 as a political refugee from French-occupied Berlin, but at that time Grundtvig still resided at Egeløkke, so they did not meet.

He specifies that the Æsir and Vanir gods fell as they began to strive for self-consciousness. To Grundtvig All-Father meant the absolute identity of everything prior to all kinds of dualism, but as an intervening person he had to remain invisible, inaccessible and unimaginable. Therefore, he took care not to show this universal principle being directly involved in any part of an episode together with the traditionally presented characters of Æsir and Vanir gods or with giants or human beings. Grundtvig never specified the previous relation between All-Father and the Æsir with further details. In his 1808 handbook, *Nordens Mytologi* ('Mythology of the North'), he uses the term 'a pure point of indifference' from German philosophers of Nature about a mysterious power which is *ren*, *blind og taus* ('pure, blind, and silent') (*US*: I, 334–35 n.).[11] His letter to Nyerup suggests that such an assumption at least endows all Norse myths with a certain unity that is otherwise missing.

In his periodical contribution Grundtvig starts his own tentative recreation of Norse mythology with the Norns who are safely warranted in reliable sources. In numerous single incidents the Norns as tools for All-Father weaken the opposing parties of tainted gods and openly evil giants, while human beings freely elect to side with either party. When equilibrium has finally been reached, Ragnarōk (a universal battle) is released during which Æsir gods and giants very accurately eliminate one another, and the Earth with all its inhabitants perishes in fire and floods. A new Earth with rejuvenated and purer deities and human beings is created, and time is substituted by Eternity. Grundtvig claims this comprehensive vision surpasses Greek mythology by far, though he admires and praises the Greeks for their fine sense of well-defined deities provided with beautiful external adornments.

Ten years later Grundtvig called his 1807 essay *et Skjaldekvad i fortløbende Rhytmus* ('a skaldic poem in an unbroken rhythm'), seeing in its contents *det mest Poetiske der er opkommet i min Hjerne* ('the most poetic idea ever emerging from my brain').[12] In his new Danish translation of Snorri's *Edda* (1808: 8, 14, 17, 18, 23, 31, 37, 49, 96), Rasmus Nyerup acknowledges the expertise of Grundtvig's youthful treatments of Norse myths in no less than nine footnotes.

[11] Steffens had also touched on this term, familiar to him from Friedrich Schelling's philosophy, at the end of his 1802 lecture no. 6.

[12] *US*: III, 516 (from *Danne-Virke*, 1817), and an unpublished manuscript from 1818 (MS fascicle 208, no.11, p. 43[r]).

A New Methodology

During 1805, his first Egeløkke year, Grundtvig slowly realized that poetry and scholarship were not to be separated in his writings. In an unpublished and undated fragmentary manuscript,[13] he admitted to himself that rather than being a regular poet he possessed a particular innate gift for history and thus might be the only living advocate for those times long past. He found that as an academic scholar he had to alternate between contemplation of the whole and scrutinizing examinations of every detail. In modern terms these alternatives represented major currents from two centuries, Romanticism of the nineteenth and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Grundtvig found a combination of these methods exemplary, so this formula — also favoured by Steffens in the second paragraph of his first introductory lecture on philosophy from November 1802 — became his favourite tool, although his minute learned examinations tended to be toned down or overlooked both during his lifetime and in early scholarly Grundtvig research. In this respect he was involuntarily taken hostage by his own much later long and eager battle against academic institutions as schools for death.

New Copenhagen Years, 1808–11

Late in April 1808 Grundtvig left Egeløkke for good to settle down in Copenhagen. As he tells Skougaard in Aalborg in a private letter of 4 June 1808 (Christensen and Grundtvig 1924–26: I, 15–16), in May of that year he had transcribed all the as yet unedited eddic poems, studied the German epics *Nibelungenlied* and *Heldenbuch* and tried his hand at myths of India (without knowing Sanskrit). Much of this work was in vain, since he found both the heroic lays of the Poetic Edda about the Volsungs and the corresponding sources in the medieval German language to be young and meagre of mythology. He supposed a common source in lost ancient legends for both of them but did not believe the actually preserved texts to be related.

As a promising academic Grundtvig was soon granted a scholarship and given lodging at the oldest Copenhagen residential college, Valkendorfs Kollegium, only a few minutes' walk from the University and its library. He moved in on 25 May 1808. What Grundtvig read and discussed with scholars and students in this new setting cannot be determined, because he discontin-

[13] MS fascicle 257, 'On the Written Monuments of Ancient Scandinavia and Particularly on the Poetic Edda: An Application Addressed to all True Scandinavians', pp. 1^{v}–2^{r}.

ued his diary and wrote almost no private letters. He mixed especially with young Norwegians who, like himself, were far away from home.[14]

In a poem published in a newspaper from September 1808 called *Gunderslev Skov* ('Gunderslev Forest'), Grundtvig writes about an actual trip he took with his friend Christian Molbech (1783–1857) to a mid-Sjælland monument, an ancient dolmen, taking it for a heathen altar. The poem describes in detail Grundtvig's difficult route through the dense forest in phases corresponding to his gradual advances in knowledge about the Norse pre-Christian religion. The poem does not mention precise mythical details, neither names nor incidents. It just talks generally about voices echoed from the past in the present-day thicket with its windblown treetops and gurgling brooklets as faint memories of the vanished power of the Æsir gods and of bygone sacrifices for them. Only the very real archaeological remnants in solid granite appealed deeply to Grundtvig, enthusing him as *et Fund af herlige Minder om Fædres Storhed og Tro paa det Aandelige* ('a find of magnificent relics reminding us of our forefathers' grandeur and their belief in the spiritual'), as stated by him in a postscript to a reprint in 1815 (Grundtvig 1815: 37). His versified travelogue ends as, with tears in his eyes, he hurries to kneel at the supposed holy spot, quivering with pleasure. Already in 1808 this poem was misunderstood as a desperate but vain attempt to revive the Æsir religion. But what Grundtvig really praises in the lines quoted here are not the gods whom he definitely regards as *hensovne* ('having passed away'). He wants to demonstrate his deep respect for the cultural achievement of the ancestors who were not yet familiar with Christianity but anyway believed in the reality of the power of the spirit. And in the actual poetical text even Grundtvig's spontaneous final action remains only an intention and is not reported as something he actually carried out.

Nordens Mytologi *(1808) — The Big Move*

Grundtvig's actual writing of a much needed modern handbook of Norse mythology took place in his new academic setting in Copenhagen, following the plan he unfolded in a letter of 6 January 1808 to Rasmus Nyerup (Christensen and Grundtvig 1924–26: 1, 6–14). In the first half of July he was busy concluding and formulating the results of his various studies since May 1807. A letter of 5 July to Christian Molbech tells that he feels extremely dissatisfied with his manuscript because he has found the perfect form for it but at

[14] The first Norwegian university was only instituted in 1811, functioning in Christiania (later called Oslo) from 1813 onwards.

the same time one which is the least suitable for his set purpose, and he is close to giving up. A week later, 12 July, in another letter to Molbech, he complains of being chained to his writing desk (Molbech and Schrøder 1888: 18), but in a letter to his older brother Otto of 16 July, he reports having sold his text to the prominent Copenhagen publisher and court bookseller Johann Heinrich Schubothe for 6 rix-dollars per sheet. Though he added that the production was soon to start, a delay occurred, so it was only on 28 October 1808 that he signed the preface and handed the entire text to the printer. The book appeared on 5 December, comprising altogether 227 pages. The manuscript sent to the printer has not been preserved.

The full title runs *Nordens Mytologi eller Udsigt over Eddalæren for dannede Mænd der ei selv ere Mytologer* ('Mythology of the North or Survey of the Edda Doctrine for Cultured Men who are not Mythologists Themselves'). Grundtvig promises to present all known Norse myths, considering them to have been part of a generally accepted faith.[15] He addresses readers who are unfamiliar with the field but curious to learn about it. So the book is neither a completely scholarly treatise nor a popular presentation for everybody, and it is absolutely not an anthology-like reader with an informative selection of authentic ancient texts. In fact, the most complete renditions of single myths are found in Grundtvig's own inserted poetical recreations. Direct quotations from Poetic Edda texts and other sources are normally brief and carefully selected. Most of Grundtvig's discoveries and new interpretations are treated in the chronological survey. The finished book consists of seven parts, varying greatly in size and importance (and in the following discussion marked by Roman numerals).

First, a dedicatory poem, 'Til Justitsraad *Pram*' (I) greets Christen Henriksen Pram (1756–1821), Norwegian-born author of a long-winded verse epic *Stærkodder* (1785).[16] Pram was surprised at this gesture because he did not consider himself a specialist on early Norse history and myths and had not met Grundtvig.[17] Grundtvig modestly claims that his handbook merely assembles pieces from a split granite stone, bringing it back to its previous status as a monument from Norse antiquity telling of great deeds by gods and heroes

[15] Suhm's 1771 Odin study may have given him this impression.

[16] For another view of Pram, see Chapter 5.4 above.

[17] From 1815 onwards, Grundtvig and Pram were to cooperate as elected leaders of a new private historical society in Copenhagen which, among other things, was to take care of practical chores regarding the future distribution of Grundtvig's translations of Saxo and Snorri. Living in the same town, they could easily meet to discuss things orally, so their relationship cannot be substantiated with written evidence.

in carved runic letters. He has only rid these signs of moss. Myths only being rarely and briefly alluded to in runic inscriptions, Grundtvig's image simply indicates their great age.

Next in the *Preface* (II), Grundtvig states that the Æsir mythology is the oldest known religion of Scandinavia. He continues by describing his relationship to recent predecessors. Eight fine scholars (Thomas Bartholin in 1689 and, from the late eighteenth century, P. F. Suhm, B. C. Sandvig, Friedrich David Gräter, Johann Gottfried Herder,[18] Skúli Thorlacius, W. H. F. Abrahamson and Rasmus Nyerup) are labelled *Røste i Ørken* ('voices in the wilderness') (cf. Isaiah 49.3). The poets Jens Baggesen and Pram are mentioned though in guarded expressions, while Oehlenschläger is praised highly for having through his unique poetic efforts aroused curiosity in the best of his readers about the actual contents of Norse religion. Contrarily, renowned learned German scholars of the late Enlightenment are definitely downgraded as petty-minded souls ignorant of the material which they misdate and dissociate themselves from, being lured into false positions by weak-sighted scholars in Scandinavia such as the Swedish historian Olof von Dalin (1708–53) and his supporters (on Dalin, see Chapter 4.4 above).[19]

In the *Introduction* (III) Grundtvig lists the sources of the myths, dating them with specific attention to their place in his own synthesis, which ranks *Vǫluspá* as indubitably the oldest and best text from antiquity. Here Grundtvig neither relies on philology alone nor on newly developed archaeology. He also shuns recognized patterns of relativistic cultural history (e.g., in French by Voltaire, Montesquieu and Paul Henri Mallet). All through his life he stuck to the opinion that this most informative poem was composed centuries before the Viking raids.[20] The second best source in Grundtvig's opinion is *Hyndluljóð* for its abbreviated version of *Vǫluspá*. Other poems about individual inci-

[18] Herder is included because in Vol. II of his *Volkslieder* (1779), he translated *Vǫluspá* into German from the text in Icelandic and Latin accompanying Peder Hansen Resen's 1665 edition of Snorri's *Edda*.

[19] Much more radical and unbelievable than Dalin was the here omitted Swedish polyhistor Olof Rudbeck (1630–1702) with his four volumes of *Atlantica sive Manheim* (1679, 1689, 1698 and 1702). He is mentioned briefly in Grundtvig's *World Chronicle* of 1812 for having located the biblical Paradise in Sweden and invented miraculous reports from the most ancient and absolutely dark periods in the life of humankind (*US*: II, 356, cf. MS fascicle 209, no. 9). Grundtvig did not like Swedes.

[20] In a fragmentary manuscript from 1808–10, Grundtvig estimated it to have originated in the fifth century AD (MS fascicle 260).

dents he thinks to be younger, though they clearly date back to texts now lost. *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* and *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* he finds too obscure to consider, and *Hárbarðsljóð* is disregarded for its bad style.

But the poorest of all thinkable sources to Grundtvig's mind in 1808 is Snorri's *Prose Edda*, written by one or more Christians trying to preserve genuine pre-Christian poems by piecing material from them together entirely at random (*US*: I, 260–61). Later in his book Grundtvig deems that Snorri's rendition of Thor's journey to Utgard-Loki — a most excellent narrative — excludes itself from the Æsir drama due to a total lack of mythological importance. Saxo also (in Book VIII), by making Utgard-Loki the cherished idol of one early Danish king Gorm, completely misunderstood the position of that fierce giant in paganism. Both Snorri and Saxo were euhemerists, taking the figures of Norse heathen myths for historical personages endowed with exaggerated or altered qualities, positive as well as negative. Being a diligent collector rather than a poetic seer, P. F. Suhm largely supported this theory in his Odin book of 1771. Grundtvig mentions the name Saxo fifteen times in his handbook, preferably in what he regards as minor matters; Snorri he refers to six times only (but forty-six times to the *Prose Edda*).

Three sections (*Afdelinger*) communicate the main contents of the publication. The *First Section* (IV) surveys the number, names and characteristic qualities or circumstances of all Norse deities. Here Grundtvig repeats his recent main idea of an invisible creator of everything called All-Father, though by virtue of being beyond description and not taking a direct part in the myths, he acts exclusively through his daughters, the Norns. Then as a novelty Grundtvig boldly introduces a self-invented old nameless poet who composed the Æsir religion as a philosophy that helps mankind to understand the obvious general disharmony in all earthly life (*US*: I, 265). The Æsir are busy and strong gods protecting their power but caring little or not at all for human beings. So Grundtvig's imaginary poet invented the Vanir as more human-oriented temporary gods. Freyr the Amiable especially and his sister Freyja, goddess of Love, felt responsible for connecting Heaven and Earth. They sympathized with mortals and were empowered to do them good. However, the Vanir gods, who represent fertility, peace and plenty, do not come back after the Ragnarõk battle, for in the renewed and better World with purer and kinder Æsir deities led by Baldur, they are not needed any more.

The *Second Section* (V) presents at considerable length all individual mythic actions and their higher meaning (in Danish *Gangen* and *Sandsen*). Time and again Grundtvig quotes poems of the Poetic Edda mixed with references to Saxo, Snorri, Oehlenschläger and himself. Grundtvig's 1807 contribution 'On

Norse Mythology' is deepened and elaborated to include all the myths, the epic thus spanning time from the first creation of the world to the second after the Ragnarōk doomsday battle. Already in his preface, Grundtvig spoke of the entire Norse creed as a triumphal drama (*Seiersdrama*) in five grand acts (*US*: I, 246). Now he directly points out the most decisive parts of this all-encompassing text as Act III (ending after Baldur's death and the binding of Loki), Act IV (earthly life and its degeneration and withering) and Act V (Ragnarōk). Acts I and II and the beginning of Act III Grundtvig does not indicate. He also assumes that his readers realize that his own First and Third Sections are only meant to support the Second Section as the central part of the work.

In the last paragraphs of the Second Section under the subheading of *Tilbageblik* ('Retrospect'), Grundtvig returns to his thesis of some wise old poet composing all myths in an attempt to give the pre-Christian period an entirely *man*-made — the Danish word *Menneske* here is spaced for emphasis — heathen theodicy.[21] However, after the death of the said old poet his wisdom was soon repressed and forgotten, and the task for scholars and readers of today is to regain the lost meaning of the Norse myths. Quoting his own 1807 interpretation of *Hyndluljóð* (st. 10), Grundtvig hopes that the stone shrine for the Æsir erected by Ottar (an admirer of Freyja's), which turned into glass by virtue of the constant fire from the sacrifice of animals but was later petrified to its former status, might again become clear and communicative. Grundtvig's figurative language here is not very transparent.

At this point, Grundtvig's own Christian attitude suddenly shows through. He breaks off his continuous interpretation and stresses that the Ragnarōk battle remained historically an unfulfilled prophecy, because the Christian God instead sent his own son incarnated as a human being to save mankind through proxy sufferings and sacrificial death, yet was resurrected as the true son of God and ascended to heaven — all events not found in Norse mythology. Nor are the deeds ascribed to Christ here taken from the New Testament but are based on Grundtvig's vivid poetic imagination: being the veritable son of God, the Saviour hurled down the Æsir gods from their undeserved throne, deprived the giants of their poisonous stings and finally kindled the dying embers of true divinity into holy flames reaching from earth to heaven (*US*: I, 338). Grundtvig's interpretation still made the pre-Christian Norse religion relevant, as it foreshadowed a future Christian contempt of human arrogance and sin-

[21] *US*: I, 333–35, cf. I, 265. Earlier in the preface Grundtvig stressed that his old creative poet was an ordinary mortal and not a messenger from above (*US*: I, 246).

ful selfishness and promised salvation through a purification of everything to be obtained by a change of faith. Grundtvig excuses the old poet and himself for being only mortal men, whereas Christ was a purer son of All-Father than Odin. This was, so he claims, the big religious enigma which *Vǫluspá* was not able to take into account and which his own contemporaries do not want to acknowledge.

Grundtvig's new, very brief and clear-cut change of attitude comes as a surprise and turns the handbook into a house at variance with itself, threatening to throw the whole presentation off balance. It might be thought to have constituted a last minute correction by Grundtvig, yet in his Preface he had already rejected a purely Humanistic view of earthly life in favour of ardent love for Sanctity and Truth (*US*: I, 252).

In a more modest *Third Section* (VI) Grundtvig continues his regular handbook format, dealing solely with the pagan fables or teachings accompanying the myths. Through lyrical poems of his own making he demonstrates what the fables are supposed to teach. *Asken Ygdrasill* ('The Ash Yggdrasill') describes the concept of Space and its origin and particularly Time (i.e., the dimensions of earthly history). *Duggen* ('Dew') and *Honning-Duggen* ('Honey Dew') discuss phenomena in Nature. *Odins Kvad* (*Om Skjaldskabs Ophav*) ('Odin's Lay (about the Origin of Poetry)') traces poetical composition back to Odin's theft of the mead of poetry from some mountain giants and demonstrates his sharing it with human beings. The overt as well as the underlying interpretation of these fables ought to procure a longing for Eternity among men. But in his continued lengthy account of other prevalent ideas, Grundtvig does not at all repeat the Christian arguments from his retrospective summary. The *Last Section* (VII) of Grundtvig's book is a brief two-page informative list of alternative names (i.e., *heiti* and kennings) of the Norse deities, which forms an absolute anticlimax to the work as a whole.

Nordens Mytologi*: Ideas and Structure*

The distinction between All-Father as the universal creator and Odin as the head of temporary deities is accepted and maintained by Grundtvig on the basis of the Icelandic poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* which he believed to be a part of the Poetic Edda. This evaluation was also shared by other scholars from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, though it is now thought to have been a composition of an early modern Icelandic Humanist (Lassen 2011: 7–23 and Chapter 3.2 above). The most daring hypothesis of the handbook is Grundtvig's introduction and description of the unknown old great

Norse poet composing all of the Æsir doctrine. According to Grundtvig, he either grew up on a Norwegian mountain top or came from far away. Such a character cannot be found in any of Grundtvig's earlier investigations of Norse mythology, whether private observations or published works. His use of the figure of the old poet may be comparable to Ludvig Holberg's poetical pseudonyms in the mock-epic *Peder Paars* (1719–20) and other later accounts of his, which more or less evaded legal censorship. However, Grundtvig hardly needed to fear official control. He might rather have worried, thinking of the possible reactions to his thorough preoccupation with heathendom from his firmly pious parents at the vicarage of Udby. However, neither private nor public comments from him to this effect are found.

The idea of a fictitious middleman might be seen as Grundtvig's own way of continuing Moritz's handling of mythical material in his treatise on Greek mythology from 1791. Without making too much of it, Moritz illustrated Greek legends with two verse passages (IV.5 and I.3) from the tragedy *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787) and four single poems, all by his personal friend Goethe. Grundtvig too throws light on some Norse myths by quoting or referring to Danish poets such as Johannes Ewald, Jens Baggesen and in particular Adam Oehlenschläger (thirteen times) as well as himself. The presumably historical[22] old skald Ossian in James Macpherson's translations into English from 1760–65 (with numerous reprints and translations into other European languages, especially German) and Beowulf, the protagonist of the yet unpublished Anglo-Saxon epic, are also mentioned in Grundtvig's footnotes and may have helped him to discern ancient Norse seers in or behind taciturn sources.

Grundtvig's handbook essentially moves on three tracks. First and most obvious is the straight epic line, formed by incidents and episodes linked more closely together than in any other presentations since Snorri's prose *Edda*. Later in *Danne-Virke* (1817) Grundtvig described himself as having wafted away all objections to the genuineness and high age of Norse mythology in a single breath by dating *Vǫluspá* and Snorri's *Edda* to different periods, thus putting each in its own rightful place. To him they exemplify respectively traces of a once solid construction and of a gradual development.[23] Compared to Grundtvig's closest scholarly predecessors, this is a methodological progression, though it

[22] Suhm in his 1771 treatise on Odin considers the Ossian poems to be reliable historical documents on a par with the Icelandic poems and sagas (whose authenticity was not yet considered problematic); cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen 2016.

[23] Cf. *Et Par Ord om Oldgrandskning* ('A Few Words on Antiquarianism') (1817): *Sporene af en fast, sammenhængende Bygning og en gradviis Udvikling* (*US*: III, 516).

often struck colleagues and reviewers as dubious, resulting in the disgruntled verdict that his new combinations at best were only likely, at worst unverifiable. Unfortunately, in the long run Grundtvig's faith in *Vǫluspá*'s antiquity could not be upheld. So in his old age and in the decades after his death, historians and philologists dating the poem to about 1000 AD caused the fading and ebbing away of Norse mythology at the Grundtvigian Folk High Schools.

Second, Grundtvig introduces a call for specific qualities in interpreters of mythical material. He prefers intuition expressed in visions to rationalistic speculation, rejects one-track allegories and wants to go from an uncertain and only felt or suggested (*ahnet*) synthesis to examinations of specific single features and their place and function in the myths. In his private preliminary rough drafts an interpretation often concludes in a sentence like 'I admit that it is a bit far-fetched but I really do want to make sense of this'.[24] He finds a general theme of struggle and competition, sometimes specified as conflicts in love affairs or as battles of brains solving riddles. Particularly in the case of the Vanir gods Freyja and Freyr, an idea of the bliss of a divine existence is opposed to a degrading earthly sensuality, associated with human beings or even with bestial giants.

Third, Grundtvig's scholarly approach is philologically superior to that of his closest competitors. Suhm's Odin-study from 1771 abounds in knowledge and facts from various primary and secondary sources, sketching differences between them, but is reluctant to classify them, and the numerous individual deities listed hardly all belong to a single continuous narrative. Suhm frequently leaves precarious philological questions to be answered by quotations from his learned friend, the Copenhagen Icelander John Erichsen (Jón Eiríksson) (1728–87). Retelling the Ragnarök battle, Suhm tires of all the colourful details that were so important to Grundtvig, cutting them off with the uninterested phrase 'in short'. Having been taught to read Icelandic (i.e., Snorri's *Edda*) in his Trondheim years 1751–65 by his close friend, the Norwegian historian Gerhard Schøning (1722–80), Suhm usually quotes Edda poems from Thomas Bartholin (1689) and from Snorri's *Edda* plus *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál* (from P. H. Resen's edition of 1665). Hans Jacob Wille's *Udtog af den nordiske Mythologie, eller Othins Gude-Lære* ('Excerpt of Norse Mythology, or the Doctrine of Odin') from 1787, relies on Snorri in Resen's 1665 edition and on Suhm and was accepted by John Erichsen. Jacob Bærent Møinichen's alphabetic handbook from 1800, *Nordiske Folks Overtroe, Guder, Fabler og Helte indtil Frode 7 Tider* ('Superstition, Gods, Fables and Heroes of the Norse Peoples until the Period

[24] Thus, e.g., in MS fascicle 263, no.1, p. 3^{v}, dated to the summer of 1807.

of King Frodi 7'), according to his grateful preface, relies mainly on Suhm. Grundtvig thinks that both Møinichen and Wille try in vain to teach their readers what they themselves do not know (on Wille, see Chapter 5.4 above).

Compared to Suhm's handbook, Grundtvig had the advantage of knowing B. C. Sandvig's Danish translation of Latin or Icelandic texts called *Danske Sange af det ældste Tidsrum* ('Danish Songs from the Oldest Period') (1779) and his fine attempt, for the period, of rendering the mythic lays from the Poetic Edda into Danish (1783–85).[25] And Grundtvig had worked at first hand with all these texts since 1807, partly from manuscripts. Grundtvig took only seven stanzas from poems of the Poetic Edda word for word from Sandvig whereas he deliberately translated fifty-three stanzas differing somewhat (if not importantly) from Sandvig's phrasings. In an elaborate footnote he found it remarkable that *Vǫluspá* as the most fundamental poem about the gods had not been published in 1787 by the Arnamagnæan Commission together with the other mythical Icelandic poems — he even politely and unconditionally offered his personal assistance for its publication in any way needed (*US*: 1, 257 n. *). But his proposition was ignored, and the relevant third volume of the commission's edition with *Vǫluspá* did not appear until 1828, then also featuring Finn Magnusen's alphabetic dictionary in Latin for the entire Arnamagnæan edition of the Poetic Edda. In 1806–08 Grundtvig's ideal was to try to decipher the Edda myths by seeing them in their own light. Or, as he wrote in a draft on 2 June 1807, *et lyst Blik og en af Edda selv avlet Ide* ('a bright glance and an idea engendered by Edda itself') is all he needs'.[26] The glance is that of a poet.

It is evident that in his youth Grundtvig was impelled by a broad and deep interest in both published and unpublished sources of Norse mythology. He gathered particulars from the Arnamagnæan manuscripts at random and tried to piece them together from several angles. He compared his procedure to the reconstruction of ancient temples from a few broken columns lying around in a meaningless heap on an authentic site (*US*: 1, 218). Now and then in *Nordens Mytologi* Grundtvig has to confess to having helped individual sources to appear as parts of a larger entity. For example, he tries to combine the sources about the origin of poetry — *Vǫluspá*, *Hávamál*, *Grímnismál* and Snorri's *Edda* — into a poem of his own making. He prefers to trace the wonderful mead of poetry back to the Norns who dropped dew from the world tree on flowers visited by

[25] *Danske Sange* was published without any mention of Sandvig's authorship. His name is given in prefaces to the Edda-volumes. Grundtvig noticed Sandvig's 1785 Edda-translation in his diary on 28 February 1804 (*US*: 1, 50).

[26] MS fascicle 264, no. 1a, p. 7^{v}, cf. Lundgreen-Nielsen 1980: 212.

honeybees. In Snorri's *Edda* on the other hand the potent mead is brewed from honey mixed with the blood of the slain Kvasir, a very wise person once created to mark a peace treaty between the Æsir and the Vanir gods.

Reception

Grundtvig sent a copy of *Nordens Mytologi* to his father with a handwritten dedicatory poem in which he emphasized his Christian cancellation of Ragnarōk, presumably to avoid reproaches for spending time on the promotion of paganism. A brief anonymous review in the Copenhagen newspaper *Nyeste Skilderie af Kjøbenhavn* of 3 December 1808 called the book a useful publication of material, praising it for a new and brilliant manner of presentation in powerful language and for Grundtvig's inserted poems. A newspaper report from 1872 mentions that a copy of the book owned by Oehlenschläger, which has not been preserved, contained his hot-tempered handwritten marginal entries, describing Grundtvig in a now and then downright vulgar style as egotistical, inhuman and lacking filial gratitude to his predecessors. Grundtvig's criticism that Snorri probably added names of chambermaids and women of easy virtue to his enumeration of Æsir goddesses really annoyed Oehlenschläger, whose evaluation of his unwelcome rival is characterized by a general bitterness and dissociating superiority.[27]

The earth-bound Danish historian Gustav Ludvig Baden (1764–1840), in a booklet about Saxo (1809), filled his footnote 51 with arguments against Grundtvig's theories. In Baden's bibliography of Dano-Norwegian historians from 1815 Grundtvig's *Sværmerier* (fanatical and fantastic visions) are still deemed futile and worthless. Jens Møller (antagonised by Grundtvig for his poor *Skírnismál* recreation of 1806) wrote an anonymous review in 1811 in *Dansk Litteratur-Tidende*, a prestigious critical periodical issued from the University of Copenhagen.[28] He praised Grundtvig's enthusiasm, citing both his fine metrical translations of Icelandic poetry and his own inserted Danish poems. Møller especially appreciated his expanded version of *Skírnismál*. He also called Grundtvig's distinction between old and newer sources valid and

[27] See Frederik Bøgh (1836–82) in the newspaper *Fædrelandet* 33 (27 December 1872), no. 301, p. 1. Concerning the chambermaids, see *US*: I, 265.

[28] Edited by Professor P. E. Müller who from 1809 was allowed by the authorities to publish anonymous contributions in his periodicals. Jens Møller's review in 1811 comprised no. 1, pp. 1–14, and no. 2, pp. 25–32.

useful, but he disagreed with his early dating and his particular interpretation of *Vǫluspá* and rejected the idea of the whole pre-Christian Norse religion being the product of some old human poet. In a very brief statement Grundtvig dismissed Møller's objections.[29]

Abroad Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) in his Vienna periodical *Deutsches Museum* described the book as the best possible introduction to Edda studies and quoted some paragraphs (translated into German by himself) from Grundtvig's Preface (Schlegel 1812: 183–85). He thought that Grundtvig in his Skírnir and Freyr poem had proven to be a poet in the proper sense of the word. Contrarily another German scholar, Friedrich Rühs (1781–1820), in the introduction to his own German translation of Snorri's *Edda* (1812) stated that Grundtvig's poem about Yggdrasill struck him as simply wrong. Grundtvig's theory about the old poet composing the Æsir doctrine he found to be a sad example of an author's vanity, coupled with a lack of profound knowledge and with contempt for a critical approach. He conceives of Grundtvig as a lamentable echo in Denmark of modern German literature (i.e. Romanticism) and sees his *Nordens mytologi* as 'a bill of exchange issued by a bankrupt person to himself' (Rühs 1812: 158–59). A Swedish translation appeared in Stockholm in 1818 (Gullbrand 1818, reprinted in a revised edition in Ruda 1839). Otherwise Grundtvig's own entirely rewritten and considerably enlarged *Nordens Mytologi* (1832) — wrongly called by him a second edition — prevented reprints of the 1808 book in his lifetime.[30]

Further Norse Mythological Traces, 1809–11

In these years Grundtvig embarked on various enterprises that involved his representations and use of Norse religion and myth. In late December 1808 he issued a brief invitation to *Gamle Nordens Venner* ('Friends of Norse Antiquity') to subscribe to a series of volumes turning the most important recorded events from the pre-Christian centuries in Denmark (written in Latin or Icelandic) into unpretentious Danish prose accounts or versified conversations approaching a dramatic form (*US*: 1, 374–79). In December 1809 he published the first

[29] Grundtvig 1811: 63–64.

[30] Only in two much later editions of Grundtvig's selected writings in 10 volumes was the 1808 mythology included complete (*US*: 1, 243–368 and *VU*: 1, 148–249, the latter minus the dedicatory epistle to Pram). The text can now be found on the internet (www.adl.dk) as well as in a facsimile of the first edition in a modern scholarly edition with an introduction, text description and annotation (www.grundtvigsvaerker.dk).

finished volume of his semi-dramatic series with the common title page *Optrin af Nordens Kæmpeliv* ('Scenes from the Heroic Life of the North') and under the individual title of *Optrin af Kæmpelivets Undergang i Nord* ('Scenes from the Decline and Fall of Heroic Life in the North').

In another invitation to subscription in January 1810, Grundtvig offered to produce a new accurate Danish translation of the poems of the Poetic Edda, almost word for word. He gave a few examples of this project from the heroic lay of Helgi Hundingsbani, but the initiative was stalled as incomprehensible and inexpedient by the young philologist Rasmus Rask (1787–1832; see Chapter 7.1 above) in a short newspaper feud.[31] Only later did Grundtvig see this as fortunate and even for a short while in September to October 1816 studied *Beowulf* together with Rask until the latter left Denmark to set out on an extended study tour abroad. In February 1810 Grundtvig tried, together with Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872), one of his Valkendorf college fellows, to launch a new Danish periodical for current philosophy, poetry and history, called *Odin and Saga*. But this project did not attract enough subscribers and never came off.[32]

In late December 1810 Grundtvig experienced a grave religious crisis in the shape of a manic-depressive illness or total nervous breakdown, forcing him to return to his parents at Udby and rest in peace and quiet for a while. At the beginning of 1811, feeling better even if still frail, Grundtvig started to Christianize his semi-dramatic recreation of the heroic Volsung poems of the Poetic Edda (which was finished in the late summer of 1810). Now giving his Christian faith priority over all other values, Grundtvig inserted a self-invented Christian missionary called Thorkild into the action who tries to convert the ill-fated persons. Though mortally wounded himself, Thorkild most improbably at the end baptizes Odrun (sister of Atli and Brynhild), the only legendary character surviving the gory action.[33] The volume appeared on 28 December 1811 as *Optrin af Norners og Asers Kamp* ('Scenes from the Battle of Norns and Æsir'). It presented the complicated story of the Volsung family. Grundtvig originally intended it to illustrate the earliest stage of paganism in Northern

[31] A complete Danish version of the *Elder Edda* was published by Finn Magnusen in four volumes between 1821 and 1823.

[32] Lundgreen-Nielsen 1979: 10–16. The text was found in Copenhagen, The Royal Library, Add. 265, no. II, Sibbern's Papers. Grundtvig's poem 'Odin and Saga', printed in 1811, was very likely composed as a prologue for this periodical.

[33] She is known from the eddic poem *Oddrúnargrátr*.

Europe. In a double introductory scene the reader is allowed to watch the three Norns carrying out All-Father's instructions and to listen to a dialogue between Odin and Hugin, one of his clever ravens. However, Thorkild's lengthy final sermon on the main events and ensuing main teachings of the Bible impresses one much more than the scattered allusions to the Æsir faith. Grundtvig's grand plan never progressed further, although half-hearted attempts to continue it are preserved as dramatic fragments from *c.* 1809–16 and only printed posthumously.[34]

Temporarily Ringing Out

After his crisis of Christmas 1810, Grundtvig felt morally obliged to serve as a personal curate for his old and ailing father at Udby from June 1811, thus definitely putting a stop to his magnificent historico-poetic project. Norse mythology then disappears from his horizons for almost five years. The remainder of his engagement with the subject will be continued in the first chapter of Volume II of this study.

[34] *PS*: II, 439–96, dealing with the Norwegian kings Hakon Adelsten and Olaf the Holy. Svend Grundtvig's editorial datings here are rectified in the Grundtvig-registrant (MS fascicle 386, nos 82a–b and nos 80a–b).

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